DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 722 EC 181 712

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Garnett, Katherine, Ed.; Gerber, Paul, Ed. |
| TITLE | Life Transitions of Learning Disabled Adults: Perspectives from Several Countries. Monograph Number Thirty-Two. |
| INSTITUTION | World Rehabilitation Fund, Inc., New York, NY. |
| SPONS AGENCY | National Inst. of Handicapped Research (ED), Washington, DC. |
| REPORT NO | ISBN-939986-45-0 |
| PUB DATE | 85 |
| NOTE | 68p.; A part of the International Exchange of Experts and Information in Rehabilitation series. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | World Rehabilitation Fund, 440 East 34th St., New York, NY 10016 ($5.00). |
| PUB TYPE | Books (010) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC03 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Adults; *Education Work Relationship; *Employment; Foreign Countries; International Programs; *Learning Disabilities; Success; Vocational Education; *Vocational Rehabilitation |
| IDENTIFIERS | Canada; Denmark; Germany; Great Britain; Netherlands |

ABSTRACT

The collection presents six articles giving international perspectives on learning disabled (LD) adults. G. Gray begins with an analysis of "Vocational Guidance for Dyslexic School Leavers and Adults in Great Britain," in which he notes coping strategies to be used in the workplace and describes the evolution of societal attitudes to LD persons in the United Kingdom. B. Dyssegaard follows with a look at "The Transition from School to Society in Denmark." "Educational and Vocational Issues: Learning Disabled Adults in the Federal Republic of Germany" is the topic of the paper by U. Bleidick which comments upon that country's organizational flexibility as exemplified in the extension of school attendance to a voluntary 10th year. Among the "Canadian Perspectives on Youth & Adults with Learning Disabilities--1985" considered by C. Smith are views of vocational rehabilitation and barriers to success for LD people. M. Bruck adds a review of data on "The Long-Term Prognosis of Childhood Learning Disabilities: A View from Canada." In the final paper, "Learning Disabled Adults in the Netherlands: A Problem for the Future?" A. Wilmink and R. deGroot examine effects of structural provisions for LD students in that country. (CL)

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# 32 LIFE TRANSITIONS OF LEARNING DISABLED ADULTS: PERSPECTIVES FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES

Edited by: Katherine Garnett, Hunter College, CUNY
Paul Gerber, University of New Orleans

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World Rehabilitation Fund

International Exchange of Information in Rehabilitation

MONOGRAPH NUMBER THIRTY TWO

# LIFE TRANSITIONS OF LEARNING DISABLED ADULTS: PERSPECTIVES FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES

**Edited by**
**Katherine Garnett, Hunter College, CUNY**
**Paul Gerber, University of New Orleans**

EC 181702

International Exchange of Experts and Information in Rehabilitation
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400 East 34th Street
New York, New York 10016

ISBN #939986-45-0

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

Over the past six years the World Rehabilitation Fund has published twenty-nine monographs in its International Exchange of Experts and Information in Rehabilitation series. This has been possible through a grant from the National Institute of Handicapped Research which encourages the international exchange of ideas.

The International Exchange of Experts and Information in Rehabilitation project's raison d'etre is to "import" knowledge and new ideas from abroad which have the potential of enhancing the knowledge base in the U.S.

In the 1985 monograph series five new monographs have been prepared by foreign authors. They are:

**Monograph #30—EMPLOYER INITIATIVES IN THE EMPLOYMENT OR RE-EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: PERSPECTIVES FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES**

**Monograph #31—THE MORE WE DO TOGETHER: ADAPTING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (The Nordic Committee on Disability)**

**Monograph #32—LIFE TRANSITIONS OF LEARNING DISABLED ADULTS: PERSPECTIVES FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES**

**Monograph #33—SWEDISH ATTENDANT CARE PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND OLDER PERSONS: DESCRIPTION, ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH ISSUES FROM A CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE, by Adolph Ratzka**

**Monograph #34—BRIDGES FROM SCHOOL TO WORKING LIFE, by Trevor Parmenter (MacQuarie University—Australia)**

Two of these monographs, #30 and #32, have been prepared using the contributions of several authors selected through an extensive network of contacts which the IEEIR has developed over the years.

Two editors were selected to work with project staff because of their particular expertise in the area of learning disabilities and transitions. We are most grateful to Paul Gerber of the University of New Orleans and Katherine Garnett of Hunter College (NYC) who have provided a great deal of time and energy for this monograph.

The subject of this monograph—transitions—has been given a great deal of consideration in relation to people with physical disabilities, but very little real study has been done in relation to adults with learning disabilities. Finding foreign authors who had been working in this area and who could address the broad topic and the subtopics which we wanted addressed proved to be somewhat difficult. Nonetheless, we appreciate very much the efforts of those authors who did

agree to participate in this project and who attempted to dip into the knowledge base in their countries to provide us in the U.S. with information and insights from their countries.

This is what the international exchange of experts and information in rehabilitation is all about.

We hope you the reader will find this sharing of ideas exhilarating and beneficial.

James F. Garrett, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator

Diane E. Woods, Project Director
International Exchange of Experts
and Information in Rehabilitation
World Rehabilitation Fund, Inc.

September 1985

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**About the Editors**

*Katherine Garnett* is Associate Professor and Major Advisor in the Graduate Learning Disabilities Specialization within the Hunter College Department of Special Education in NYC. She is also a curriculum consultant for the Human Resources School in Albertson, Long Island and is frequently an invited speaker at organizational meetings and conferences. In 1984 she authored a monograph for college faculty and administration entitled: *Dispelling the Myths: College Students and Learning Disabilities*. Among her recent publications is an article on adults with learning disabilities, published in the Winter Issue of *Rehabilitation World*.

*Paul Gerber* has been an Associate Professor in Learning Disabilities at the University of New Orleans since 1981 in the Department of Special Education. Dr. Gerber has published numerous articles related to transitions from school-to-work. In 1983, he was asked to recommend research priorities to the National Institute of Handicapped Research and as a result of his involvement prepared a state-of-the-art report on the special rehabilitation needs of learning disabled adults, published in the special Learning Disabilities issue of the *Journal of Rehabilitation*. Dr. Gerber is a past-fellow of the World Rehabilitation Fund's International Exchange of Experts and Information in Rehabilitation. He studied the school-to-work transition of learning disabled students in the Netherlands and Denmark.

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## INTRODUCTION: INTEGRATING PERSPECTIVES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

### Societal Context of Learning Disabilities

A number of important themes emerge from this collection; some of these themes reflect broad societal forces—the dramatic rise of unemployment, shrinking economic resources, and the tugging of politically different visions. The current circumstances and future prospects of learning disabled individuals within each of the societies represented in this volume are molded, in large measure, by these over-arching societal forces.

As in America, there are ubiquitous signs that shrinking social safety nets are changing the configuration of services in England, Canada, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. The authors of this monograph offer an interesting balance of hope and pessimism within the common acknowledgement that economic realities are increasingly restrictive, social programs are being reshaped and their aims constrained as burgeoning unemployment idles even the most able, especially the young. In Germany, Bleidick views the constricting forces, especially those resulting in unemployment, as a gloomy signal for the future of learning disabled individuals. Both Gray and Smith, tracing the growth of LD services in England and Canada, respectively, highlight the powerful importance of non-governmental advocacy groups and see hopeful signs of improved services and accommodations for learning disabled individuals based on legislation and on the expanding public awareness of learning disabilities. From Denmark, Dyssegaard sees hope and strength in the emergence of self-advocacy and LD peer groups.

Several contributors to this volume note that a major result of high unemployment in their countries is the return to or continuation of education/training for many who would otherwise be in the workforce. This recycling back into education is having several effects on people with learning disabilities: first, it means much more competition for slots in education/training programs, with a concomittant bumping of those on the lowest rung. It also means higher formal standards for training programs and for entry-level jobs. These often-inflated entry standards tend to throw up unscaleable initial barriers to many LD individuals who, once hired, could *in fact* do the job well. Additionally, great increases in the number of those extending their education/training is fostering an interesting socio-political shift: a significant societal load is being shifted from the streets and unemployment lines to educational/training institutions. In effect, education is being reshaped...so perhaps we should re*think* it in the process.

Academic education, vocational preparation, and on-the-job training are increasingly recurring experiences in adult life. It seems that schooling will not simply be over and done with in the lives of many people with learning disabilities, but rather may well pop up repeatedly at life's wily turns.

Thus, it is a delight to learn about the resourcefully varied forms of schooling described in this monograph: Denmark sprouts special-focus courses *upon request* whenever a small group of adults agrees upon their need and gives it voice; the Netherlands promotes maximum *cross-over* from lower to higher levels of training, so that learning disabled students do not remain mired in a particular program; Germany increasingly dovetails the vocational preparation of LD students with general education and academic work within its framework of vocational education; Canada's Chisholm Centre stands out as an important model rehabilitation program for learning disabled adults.

**Organization of LD-Related Services**

There appears to be consensus among these authors that the best organizational scheme for educating, training and supporting LD students at all levels includes: multiple options, flexibility of movement between the varied options, strong linkages between programs with empowered and knowledgeable coordinators who can access appropriate services and act as co-advocates with LD youth and adults. In addition, the authors agree that such a support network should be available and responsive over a lifetime of needs.

While only a small subgroup of people with learning disabilities need long-term, supervised living/employment support, a sizeable number may need supports at transition points in their lives. Having a learning disability can mean that seriously disconcerting difficulties reemerge with unexpected force as situations or settings change, as demands increase or as the cast of life's characters changes. Often it is hard for a person with learning disabilities to anticipate how their weaknesses will become manifest in a new demand situation; this unpredictability can be anxiety-provoking, to say the least. Thus, the notion of "lifelong learning" means that adaptive social supports should be available to be accessed at different life stages for changing purposes. The trick is how to resourcefully provide services within a context of increasingly restricted resources—how to expand, adapt, and link options to support lifelong learning within overextended societies which are bent on cutting back.

**The Content of LD-Related Services**

Often, in looking to reshape the *organization* of services, we neglect to reconsider the particulars of content—*what* is needed *in particular* by *particular* people with learning disabilities. The contributors to this volume offer significant insight into the diverse needs of learning disabled adults. They share portraits of particular learning disabled people, while also imparting valuable understandings gained from quality programs for LD children and adults. The lessons from each of these sources are important ones to heed in planning LD-related services, whether these be academic programs, vocational training, job enhancement services, counselling, fam-

ily services, or social skills development.

From Germany, Bleidick reminds us that the "best" educational practices are needed by LD learners, who are particularly vulnerable to inconsistent instruction, inadequate examples and insufficient practice or application of what they are taught. Interestingly, several of the authors echo this notion that learning disabilities are a greater-than-usual vulnerability to weak instructional practices. In most ways, the special needs of learning disabled people are more intense versions of all learners' needs; to that degree, perhaps, then, we can judge the overall health of any educational enterprise in terms of how well its learning disabled students are served.

Bleidick also specifies particular instructional principles which need to be conscientiously applied with LD learners: more illustrations and concrete examples, more intensive practice, more careful step-by-step teaching and a more specific focus on transferring what is learned in one circumstance to other situations and settings.

From Canada, Bruck underscores that in academic areas more schooling can make a difference, with its daily exposure and intensive practice. She suggests a focus on basic spelling and pronunciation patterns with concomittant work on compensatory strategies such as systems for monitoring reading comprehension and computer-based word-processing. In the social vein, Bruck's empirical data suggest that social/adaptive teaching should focus on specific methods for controlling temper flares and developing constructive alternative responses to frustrations.

Also from Canada, Smith points out that often LD adolescents and young adults are tracked into non-academic and vocational "streams" as if that placement were sufficient to their needs. She argues that, even when such placement is appropriate more specific attention needs to be paid to each student's particular learning deficits. This attention, Smith says, needs to consist of adjustment and adaptions in teaching methods, intensive focus on that which is most essential to learn, and a serious emphasis on developing lifelong techniques to circumvent or compensate for weak areas. She advocates developing relaxation techniques and organizational systems as particularly valuable lifelong compensations.

Gray's portraits from England suggest that learning disabled individuals need to focus directly on specific useable job skills such as the learning of specific spelling words needed in taking sales orders. His portraits also point up that it is important for learning disabled people to discover and validate their strengths and to persist throughout their lives in creative problem-solving around their weaknesses. Gray also reminds us not to assume that a severe learning difficulty in one area necessarily predicts similar weakness in other areas. In fact, we may overlook strong talents because of our mistaken assumptions about generalized deficits.

For example, one person can be terribly unreliable with numbers, very poor at spelling and abysmal at alphabetizing, and yet demonstrate talent in

group leadership and project planning. Another person can be unable to write readable reports or to give coherent verbal presentations, but yet have talent and unusual persistence in unraveling technical/mechanical difficulties. Still another person may seem dense, unresponsive, and apparently unwilling to carry out instructions in a work situation where the communication style is indirect, full of innuendo, irony and back-handed humor; nevertheless, when communication is direct, feedback is explicit, and crucial verbal subtleties are explained, this same person can blossom into a responsive, hard-working and committed employee.

**The Need for Understanding**

Another common theme which emerges with force in this monograph is the importance of developing a high level of public awareness concerning learning disabilities, so as to combat misunderstanding and thereby curb its damaging effects. Repeatedly the monograph authors point to unnecessary barriers and needless pain caused by lack of understanding on the public's part that specific *dis*abilities need not mean *in*ability: that poor reading need not mean poor thinking; that confused spelling need not indicate lack of alertness; that slower learning of certain types of concepts does not necessarily mean limited learning processes. Learning disabled individuals present puzzling and paradoxical contrasts of strengths and weaknesses which are too often mistaken for laziness, carelessness and/or generally limited mental ability. Each of the contributing authors views such myths and mistakings about LD individuals as the major handicapping force in their lives. The authors therefore advocate widespread dissemination of comprehensive accurate information.

Lack of understanding is also noted as a pervasive and serious problem among learning disabled people themselves. To "know thyself" seems, in large measure, to be the major developmental task of our adults years. Knowing oneself is, as most of us know, an arduous, long-term and often risky business, much influenced by the baggage we bring from childhood. There is ample reason for many learning disabled adults not to know themselves well. Often in their younger years they were not understood by their caretakers and thus were reflected back to themselves in distorted ways. Interaction with and feedback from the world around them provided repeatedly inconsistent, negative, puzzling and contradictory messages ('You can do *this*/Why can't you do *that?*); their self-explanations were often some version of 'I'm just not good enough...no matter what I do.' To defend a vulnerable core of self-worth, they frequently developed face-saving strategies and avoidance patterns.

Thus, the common adult struggle to "know thyself" is, for many people with learning disabilities, immeasurably entangled with a history of shame and self-blame which continues to be reinforced even in adulthood by misunderstanding on the part of others. It is understandable that so many

learning disabled adults go to great lengths to hide their differences/difficulties. But, inevitably, staying hidden consumes much of their needed energy and adds to the veil between self and knowing. All too often, remaining closeted also keeps people with learning disabilities from discovering one another, from hearing each other's stories and discovering the relieving truth that they are not alone. The processes of self-knowledge and self-acceptance—opening fearfilled closets, altering outdated protective patterns, reformulating the not-good-enough internal tapes—these processes take time, courage and company. The voices from England, Canada, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands all echo the crucial importance of LD individuals proceeding towards greater self-knowing and thereby towards increased responsibility for their actions in the world, including those less-than-perfect actions related to their learning disabilities.

It seems equally crucial that we as a society proceed towards greater self-knowledge and increased acceptance of all facets of our collective self. People with learning disabilities offer especially valuable lessons which the contributors to this volume have attended to well and share generously with us.

**Katherine Garnett, Ed.D.**

# VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR DYSLEXIC SCHOOL LEAVERS AND ADULTS IN GREAT BRITAIN

**by Guy Gray**

### What is Dyslexia?

In the U.K. the terms "dyslexia" and "specific learning difficulty" are often used interchangeably. These terms refer to a disorder whereby children and adults, for no apparent reason, experience problems in learning to read and write. The World Federation of Neurologists agreed in 1968 to the following definition:

> "Specific development dyslexia—a disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and sociocultural opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin."

This somewhat narrow definition does not take into account the fact that not all reading problems stem from dyslexia, or that people with dyslexia also often have trouble with writing, spelling and arithmetic processing. It is important to note that the term "dyslexia" is used to cover a wide range of handicaps, from mild spelling difficulties to complete illiteracy.

Although the exact nature of the neurological causation is not usually known, major factors contributing to the various forms of dyslexia seem to be constitutional and to arise from the interplay of:

a. Familial predisposition (when there is predisposition to developmental lag affecting language).
b. Birth difficulties, giving rise to temporary oxygen deprivation and to delayed maturation.

### Presenting Signs in School Leavers and Adults

These tend to be diverse, as might be expected from the multiple causative factors involved in individual cases. A few of the more common features are listed below:

*Medical History*

Suggestive of family predisposition and/or birth difficulties. Often includes history of developmental language delay or delays in physical maturation and coordination (sometimes including directional nominating confusion, e.g., confusing names of left and right).

*Psychological Test Results*

Suggest specific difficulty in establishing stable correspondence between written and spoken sounds and words, despite adequate general intellectual ability.

*Educational History*

History of difficulty in learning to read and spell in the absence of

significant extrinsic factors such as poor eyesight, hearing impairment, missed schooling, severe cultural disadvantage or primary emotional maladjustment. School reports indicate obvious discrepancy between different aspects of school performance.

*Employment Difficulties*

Problems may arise from inadequacies in written expression involving letters or numbers, including difficulties in: completing application forms, taking down telephone messages, and/or writing out work requisitions or reports.

Despite apparently good practical skills, learning disabled individuals may have difficulty in obtaining apprenticeship or entry into Technical College, due to low educational achievement in writing or arithmetic.

**Considerations for Remedial Education and Career Planning**

In view of the latent potential often possessed by a dyslexic school leaver —so far not realized due to the "hidden handicap" of his dyslexia—those concerned with careers, advice, placement and recruitment need to seriously consider the dyslexic's growth potential. The dyslexic school leaver and adult can often be regarded as a "moving target" capable of improvement and therefore needing plans and goals which are both short and long term. A short term plan is needed to provide employment consistent with the present educational level. At the same time, provision needs to be made for remedial work which will allow for the raising of that level. The long term plan would take into consideration the increased employment scope made possible by improvement in educational standard.

**Dyslexic School Leavers Do Not Have Deficiencies in All Areas**

Adult dyslexics will often have acquired a much better standard of reading than spelling, and it is the latter and the relatively poor standard of written expression which will often constitute the main occupational handicap. It is often the case, for example, that they can find ways to deal with a lack of reading fluency or speed (some correctly guessing less familiar words from the context or by reference to a diagram, etc.) The more enduring difficulties with spelling and writing are not insuperable, but may require a fairly lengthy period of specialized teaching.

**Guidance Information for Employers**

*Selection*

Many dyslexics have good employment or training potential but are not so good at written work, e.g., filling out application forms or taking verbally biased selection tests. No employer can, therefore, really afford to disregard the possibility that too rigid a selection procedure may be depriving him/her of good potential. Given encouragement and educational facilities, dyslexics can improve their educational standard over a period of time. Moreover,

Municipalities, Guilds, and other examination authorities do make allowances for dyslexics.

It is important to note that some dyslexics have obtained final City & Guilds Certificates with distinction; others have become research scientists, biochemists, architects and members of other scientific technical professions.

*Training*

In the case of a dyslexic technical trainee, good spatial aptitude will often enable quicker intuitive grasp of what is technically required than would be possible solely through verbal or written instructions. As the dyslexic's practical aptitude is quite often superior to his/her verbal aptitude, he/she may also in some cases learn more rapidly if verbal instructions are supplemented by practical demonstration and/or technical drawings.

Sometimes dyslexics tend to lack numerical fluency with =, −, ×, + sums, but can nevertheless do well at more advanced maths requiring intelligence; use of a calculator may help the dyslexic become a competent figure worker.

While some dyslexics do have difficulties with lack of numerical fluency, some do not, and others find ways around such difficulties and can become very proficient in mathematical occupations dependent on high intelligence and analytical abilities.

Although often lacking fluency in written expression, some dyslexics have shown verbal aptitude in occupations such as Sales Representative and Middle Management. Because they tend to be slower at processing symbols, some dyslexics are not up to average speed on tasks such as shorthand/typist, punch card operator, or with filing and copying tasks.

*Promotion*

Highly competent conscientious employees with dyslexia have been known to be reluctant to accept promotion because they do not wish to admit writing and spelling difficulties, which hitherto they have hidden for fear of being thought "stupid" and unworthy for promotion to various posts requiring increased writing skills (e.g., site or works foreman, area sales representative). Employers should be on the lookout for such cases, and try to ensure that such employees, by knowing that their employer understands their dyslexic difficulties, are thereby encouraged to obtain the necessary remedial education and to use relevant aids (e.g., dictaphones, calculators) to enhance their chances of promotion.

### Coping Strategies in the Workplace

Often elaborate coping strategies are devised by dyslexics. These can have beneficial and not-so-beneficial effects. Many strategies involve "covering up" or circumventing possibilities of revealing dyslexic weakness in reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic. The sometimes realistic fear is that revealing will result in devaluation in front of employers and colleagues. There are frequently strongly felt emotions of inferiority and/or of having "a

skeleton in the cupboard" which must not be revealed for fear of incurring further embarrassment and damage to the self-image. Various strategies have evolved to avoid, to bypass, or to mitigate the effects of vulnerable areas of dyslexic weaknesses. The following represent case study examples of such strategies:

*Case Studies of Coping Strategies in Sales Commercial Work Situations*

- Dyslexic sales personnel revealed that they had avoided making spelling errors in front of customers by slipping out of sight with the excuse of a forgotten pen or glasses.
- Some sales personnel, usually those who were particularly sociable and ambitious for promotion found it very depressing to need to disavow to their management any desire for promotion, because of their fear of revealing dyslexia. In such a situation, one strategy was to muster up the courage (sometimes with strong backing from the Occupational Psychologist who had identified the dyslexia) to explain their problem to the Management. Management was sometimes quite sympathetic and understanding, placing more importance on proven sales and organizing ability than on a written fluency, arranging for the dictation of letters and written reports.
- Another strategy was to learn by heart a spelling vocabulary of only operationally relevant words. Specialized remedial tuition for adult dyslexics can use multi-sensory methods in order to build up this limited spelling vocabulary. A helpful adjunct is a small pocket dictionary with just those words that will be required in taking orders.
- Dyslexics can overcome sequential memory difficulties in =, −, ×, ÷ calculations by using a calculator. Since the early 1970's, the Department of Employment in the U.K. has recognized this particular difficulty affecting many dyslexics and has advised them and employers to use calculators, and offered to sponsor this assistance; nowadays it is not unusual to find a dyslexic clerk or storekeeper in possession of his own calculator.
- Dyslexics who have difficulty meeting the speed requirements of clerical work in an office can ask for transfer to customer contact work. A stock exchange staffer, mainly involved in customer contact, was temporarily transferred to a share registration task due to a business recession. His inaccuracy in recording share certificate numbers meant that he had to slow down considerably in order to ensure accuracy. The Occupational Psychologist identified the dyslexia, which was explained to management, who restored his previous post as soon as possible.
- Occasionally an executive may need to undertake duties for which, in the main, he is highly qualified, but which include a few duties in which his dyslexic weakness might place him at a serious disadvantage. In one such case a senior executive was appointed as Director with major responsibility for

liaison with the managing directors of many independent companies. Although his new post was well within his organizing skills and well suited to his personality and aptitudes for dealing with people, nevertheless it held a few serious difficulties given his dyslexic weaknesses. For one thing, the volume of correspondence was too much for him to manage, since he was a slow reader due to his dyslexia. His successful strategy was to ask for and obtain the assistance of a member of senior staff in the reading and extracting of important points of the incoming correspondence. Similarly, his dyslexic-type difficulty in remembering the sequence of observations and questions of the various contributors at the regular conferences he chaired was overcome by conferring with an alerted senior staff member who sat beside him at all meetings.

*Case Studies of Technical/Professional Coping in Technical Work Situations*

- In apprenticeship or training for a skilled craft some dyslexics may learn more easily by visual diagrams or by demonstration than by verbal descriptions or instructions. In one case, a young man with exceptional aptitude for skilled woodwork was nearly dismissed after the first month of apprenticeship, until the firm realized that when they assigned him just one specific design objective at a time, he showed talent, responsibility and efficiency. He later became Apprentice of the Year.
- A dyslexic medical student with poor visual memory was failing to make any progress at all in anatomy. His career might have ended prematurely had he not found a teacher who taught the subject functionally. When he realized that if a muscle was to do its job, it must be attached to a particular spot on a particular bone, and that a joint would not operate properly unless its ligaments and internal surfaces were in particular places and had particular shapes, then he was able to master this subject, bypassing his visual memory weakness.
- There are cases where a talented technician has climbed "up the technical ladder" to Assistant Works Manager or similar, and then, to avoid revealing dyslexic weakness, has resigned from the firm in order to find an alternative occupation or to revert to technician status. In one case, the dyslexic set up his own business which enabled him to employ his own staff, none of whom ever guessed that he was dyslexic.

**The Attitude or "Mindset" in the U.K. Regarding People With Specific Learning Disabilities**

The lot of dyslexics in the U.K. has gradually improved over the last two decades. During this time more favourable attitudes have been powerfully aided by parental and professional pressure groups, by individual professionals in medicine, psychology, speech therapy, education, and by

increasing government support.

Parental concern about children, who, for no apparent reason, had difficulty in learning to read and write, led to the formation between 1965 and 1972 of various Local Voluntary Associations. In 1972 the British Dyslexic Association (B.D.A.) was formed as the National Co-ordinating Organization for the ever increasing number of Local Dyslexia Associations. In this capacity, the B.D.A. has maintained formal links with the Department of Education, close relations with the Department of Employment and the Manpower Service Commission, and a close liaison with the Municipal Authorities and the Local Educational Authorities.

In 1969, The British Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled (now under the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) set up a National Working Party to study the problem of dyslexia in adults. This Working Party, through its distinguished chairman, Dr. John Kershaw, published its report "People with Dyslexia" in 1974. The report detailed the difficulties of adult dyslexics and offered a set of national priorities for research and service in this area.

The Kershaw report, coupled with the widely influential Tizard report and Warnock report of 1978 brought dyslexia into the national arena in the U.K., but it wasn't until the 1981 Education Act that *all* local educational agencies were required to identify and serve children with Specific Learning Difficulties.

Thus, there has been progress in the official recognition of dyslexia. Great good will and a favorable official "mindset" have developed here, but current economic stringencies hinder needed development of remedial and public awareness measures.

## THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO SOCIETY IN DENMARK
## by Birgit Dyssegaard

### Introduction

Not too long ago on my way to a meeting, I turned on the radio and found myself listening to a program with the title *Learning Disabled—A Difference in Daily Life*. As it turned out, the program was produced by a group of learning disabled students age 14-16. They discussed their own learning disabilities and the situations and problems of other learning disabled persons, e.g. they cannot find "Sam Johnson" in the phone book, order from a menu, fill out a form, read the road signs, or write a message.

Although the music chosen for the program was a song called "Words Don't Come Easy" it soon appeared that the learning disabled students were able to get their message through to their listeners quite clearly. They wanted to reduce some of the stereotypes about being learning disabled or dyslexia.

They introduced their program by asking a number of people in the streets of greater Copenhagen if they knew what learning disabilities (dyslexia) is. Examples of the answers were given throughout the program like, "oh, it is not being stupid" or "it is like something is turned the wrong way in the head" or "they cannot read words not because they are blind" or "difficulties in reading a book because they mix up the letters, but it may improve with treatment".

These comments were quite interesting because they indicated the pool of knowledge about learning disabilities in the general Danish population. Also it was a level of understanding they might expect to find when in less than six months they finish school and enter society as adults. Although the students must have realized that it might take more than one program to reduce some of the misconceptions about learning disabilities, they ended their show on an upbeat note—we *can* learn to find "Sam Johnson" in the phone book, order from a menu and fill out a form. The rest can be done when we are given the proper kind of special education and supportive services.

Hopefully these young people will not be disappointed in their encounter with the society. They must keep enough of their strength to be able to cope with their learning disabilities in adulthood. Moreover, they are hopeful that society will be better able to support them in their struggle than it is at the present time.

### The Term Learning Disabilities in Denmark

The term "learning disabilities" is not used as an official disability category in Danish special education. Presently, there is a strong movement against labeling or categorizing people with disabilities or special needs.

Learning disabilities is not likely to be introduced as a separate disability category for some time to come, if at all. Also the diverse manifestations that are included under the term might add to this hesitation about applying the term more widely in Denmark. Danish learning disabled school age students would be identified as students with severe reading and spelling problems, language problems, math problems and/or a combination of additional problems like perceptual/motor problems, social/emotional problems, minimal and cerebral dysfunction. The learning disabled adults and older students seem to prefer the term dyslexic or wordblind to describe their learning problems. The several associations for learning disabled persons also use these terms. The definition of learning disabilities offered by the United States *Federal Register* in 1977 and in Public Law 94-142 would cover those descriptions and therefore will be used in this paper.

### Some Statistics About Special Education: The School Age Population

In Denmark about 10-15 per cent of the school age population are registered as receiving some kind of special education services. Only 1 per cent of the school age population is considered to be severely handicapped.

Since learning disabilities is not listed as a separate category in official Danish statistics, it is not possible to give a precise figure for students referred to special education because of learning disabilities. *Based on the existing disability categories about half of the students are referred because of various learning problems.*

About 25-30 per cent of all students receive special education at some time during their school years. This growing number has caused enough concern for the Danish Ministry of Education to appoint a commission to look into the possible causes for this development and to give suggestions as to how the situation could be changed. It also raises questions as to how many adults have learning disabilities.

### Efforts for Learning Disabled Adults

In spite of the number of students who receive special education during their school years, a large number of learning disabled adults still feel they need to improve their basic academic skills and sign up for the many special education courses in reading, spelling and math offered by the various adult education programs. Many of the learning disabled adults make an impressive effort to improve their skills by attending evening school year after year. *In the county of Copenhagen the adult education program uses about 20 per cent of their special education resources in programs for adults with learning disabilities.*

Young adults are offered special education programs through the "youth school"—an alternative educational program especially for the youngsters ages 14-18. The "youth school" is run by the local education authorities. It

offers a large variety of educational programs and a number of social activities like excursions, dances, etc. About 70 per cent of all young people take one or more courses during the winter season.

A specialized institute, the well-known Wordblind Institute, offers more intensive courses to about 160 adults with severe dyslexia and other learning problems.

Among the growing number of young unemployed adults, there is a group whose basic academic skills are so poor that they are not able to obtain a job. A demonstration project has been set up to offer such learning disabled students an intensive, full time special education program in order that they might improve their basic academic skills enough to hold a job or to be accepted in some rehabilitation or vocational training programs. These young adults also need to improve their self confidence so they can ultimately take advantage of the regular special education programs available to them.

## Danish Special Education Legislation for Children (0-18 ys) and Adults

*Children*

Major changes in the laws pertaining to special education in Denmark were implemented on January 1, 1980. The previous system of centralization of services for handicapped students through state (federal) institutions was abolished. Today all students, even the most severely handicapped, are assured free compulsory education for at least 9 years via the general law on public education. Special education as a rule is offered by local school districts, while counties are responsible for offering special education programs for the most severely disabled school age students (0-18 ys). A more detailed description of the Danish special education system is given elsewhere (Dyssegaard, 1980; Jørgensen, 1980).

*Adults*

In 1980 a new law was enacted which ensured the right of handicapped adults to special education and special support services which may serve to remedy or reduce the effects of a handicap. The counties are responsible for providing needed special education programs free of charge for all handicapped persons. The counties run several programs for the most severely handicapped adults, but the counties also must pay the cost of programs initiated by various organizations, volunteer or political groups or the local communities, when a contract has been set up between the county and the individual program. Such contracts are signed with 54 different programs in the county of Copenhagen.

This part of the law has been emphasized to ensure handicapped persons with the same possibilites of choosing between alternative special education programs in the same way that all adults can choose from the great variety of adult education programs offered. The Danish law on special education for

adults reflects the belief that any adult considered to be in need of special education (in the opinion of the individual or a guardian) is entitled to receive it.

### Other Alternative Programs for the Handicapped Adults

If handicapped persons want to participate in other regular courses offered the adult population, a reduction in the required group size is possible to accommodate the special needs of handicapped persons. For the learning disabled person this could take place in courses in Danish literature, drama, text-analysis or other courses where severe reading problems would necessitate the use of alternative sources of information. Instead of reading the text, students are exposed to tape recordings of recitations of books, poetry or recordings of radio dramas. There are almost no restrictions in the possibilities of establishing such courses which accommodate the needs or wishes of handicapped persons as long as at least 5 persons sign up for a given course. As is the case for all other adult education courses a fee of about 15 dollars is charged for participation.

*Young adults*

Special education for young adults in secondary education or vocational training is usually offered directly through those programs as needed. Progressive legislation in this area was drafted several years ago, but it has never been enacted, possibly because of the potential for high costs. However, most counties have attempted to provide the necessary special education and support services to let young handicapped persons participate in secondary or vocational training. Bright learning disabled students always made it on their own in spite of their problems. Now special education services are provided to help the less assertive but bright youngsters succeed in a secondary education programs.

### Access to Secondary or Higher Education for Learning Disabled Persons

The Danish regulations about the requirements for entering secondary or higher education may be waived in certain cases so that handicapped students with intellectual and academic potential can continue their education in the next level of education. Waiving standard requirements for learning disabled students is most often done by providing the student with a "certificate" describing his or her problem in written language. This "certificate" is based on a recent psychoeducational evaluation and on the records of the student's earlier educational history. It is issued before a student takes his final exams. If a learning disabled student obtains a failing grade due to specific difficulties in written language, the regulations will be waived in order that a student will not fail a final exam due to his or her specific problems. Physically disabled and learning disabled students can obtain certain accommodations in the examination situation such as technical and personal assistance, longer preparation time, longer time at written exams

and tape recordings of the text.

Although certain provisions have been made for the physically or motor handicapped persons in higher education, a basic or better reading skill is necessary to fulfill the requirements of examinations. Learning disabled students might be helped by being taught to use special note techniques or by having parts of their lessons tape recorded. However, most students with severe reading problems will have to go into some kind of vocational training with a more practical emphasis (e.g. manual training).

**Special Schools for the Learning Disabled Students**

The Danish public school law makes it possible for older students (age 14-18 ys) to fulfill the last years of their compulsory education in residential schools, which offers alternative educational programs. Some of those schools offer a special program for learning disabled students. While the academic part of these programs are still important, an important part of the program is sports, recreational and social activities. An introductory course like wildlife excursion, canoetrips, hikes, etc. is often offered to help the students develop more self confidence and motivation which can transfer to academic subjects.

*The Wordblind Institute (WI)*

The Wordblind Institute offers a special day program for 100 older school age learning disabled students and a variety of courses for learning disabled adults.

The term wordblind is still used by the National Association for the WordBlind, but also by the general population in every day speech—in fact this was the term "people in the streets" were asked to define in the radio program referred to in the introduction.

A day school program is offered to students with severe dyslexia usually for a 2-3 year period. All of the students at the Wordblind Institute have been given special education programs in their local school without satisfactory results. Many of them have little motivation and very little self-confidence, but through the skillful support from expert teachers, in small groups of students with similar problems, most of the students gain enough confidence to start to learn.

The adults are usually taught in small groups or individually until they are able to join a group. The personal support offered to each member of the group, the sharing and understanding of the individual person's problems are often as important as the actual instruction itself.

*A follow-up study of graduates from the Wordblind Institute*

In 1974-75 a follow-up study of 112 students (80.5 per cent) who graduated from WI during the period of 1968 to 1973 was conducted. The main purpose of the study was to find out how to improve special education for severely dyslexic individuals. By analyzing the daily life experiences of WI graduates it was hoped to (1) gain better understanding of their general and

specific problems which they encountered after graduation (2) to find out which parts of the program were helpful, and (3) which parts should be improved in order to better meet the needs of the students (Nielsen & Pedersen, 1976 and 1977).

| | 1. Birth | | | 2. Language development | | 3. Family Size | | | 4. Intelligence | | | 5. LD influence on choice and education | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Occupation | No complication | Complication | No information | Normal | Problems | No | 1 Family member | 2 or more family members | Above average | Average | Below average | Yes | No | Don't know |
| 5 Unemployed N = 6 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4 Education N = 29 | 26 | 3 | | 24 | 5 | 7 | 13 | 9 | 11 | 16 | 2 | 7 | 15 | 7 |
| 3 Unskilled Worker N = 35 | 27 | 6 | 2 | 20 | 15 | 8 | 8 | 19 | 5 | 20 | 10 | 14 | 20 | 1 |
| 2 Vocational training N = 33 | 23 | 9 | 1 | 22 | 11 | 6 | 12 | 15 | 3 | 23 | 7 | 7 | 23 | 3 |
| 1 Skilled Worker N = 9 | 7 | 2 | | 2 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| N = 112 | 84 | 24 | 4 | 70 | 42 | 25 | 40 | 47 | 20 | 67 | 25 | 38 | 62 | 12 |
| | $x^2$ = 12,93 (sign) | | | $x^2$ = 8,36 (sign) | | $x^2$ = 11,85 (sign) | | | $x^2$ = 17,42 (sign) | | | $x^2$ = 19,74 (sign) | | |

**Table 1**
**The occupational situation of 112 Wordblind Institute graduates compared to 5 variables with significant differences.**

*Table 1* shows a comparison between the occupational situation of 112 Wordblind Institute graduates on the five variables where a significant difference was found. It is hardly surprising that complications at birth, problems in language development, family disposition, below average intelligence as well as the learning problems themselves relate negatively with the occupational situation of Wordblind Institute graduates. It might be more unexpected that the "usual" difference between the occupation of males and females was not seen and that the socio-economic status of the parents appeared to have less influence on the occupation of WI graduates. It gives cause for worry that no WI graduates attended higher education, fewer were involved in vocational training and many were unskilled workers. Wordblind Institute graduates had improved their reading skills considerably while at WI. This improvement continued after they left WI, but their academic achievement did not make it possible for most of them to obtain the educational level that would be expected from their general potential. This situation may be reflected in the fact that 45 percent of the graduates were not satisfied with their current work situation and did not expect to do well in future years.

Naturally success stories about people with learning disabilities are also found in Denmark. Examples are Hans Christian Andersen the storyteller, and Niels Bohr, a world renowned physicist, although they did not receive remedial help for their disability. Also the positive side of the data of the other half of the Wordblind Institute graduates should be emphasized, but the important question is whether the transition from school to adult life is easier today for the learning disabled graduates than it was 10 years ago.

## Transition from School to Adult Life

*The curator system*

Often the goal of special education does not extend beyond a single school year with little discussion or thought of postschool experience. This is especially true for main-streamed students, who usually do not receive preparation or training for a future occupation. Special education students are usually offered a more carefully planned transition program including several practical experiences in work-sites of their choice. The occupational counselor (curator) is responsible for helping the students select work areas appropriate for their individual skills and interests. The counselor and the teachers work closely with the "employers", the students, and their parents. Because of this system, most learning disability students from special classes have definite plans for their next step in life, whether it is continued education, vocational training or some kind of employment. In this respect they are often better off than their mainstreamed peers with learning problems. Gerber (1984) has described the positive effects of the curator model. He quotes Danish officials saying that unemployment is not higher in the learning disabled population than in the general population (when the curator model is used).

*The need for continued support from the school system during a transition period*

Once students have left school, guidance and help may be found through the social service system. Support from the social service system may include economic support, referral to employment agencies, and help with finding a place to live. However, the graduates from special programs who have no previous contact with the social service system are not comfortable entering this system and prefer to turn to their former teachers when they encounter problems. As one young adult expressed it, "I think we lost contact with the school too abruptly. There should have been a transition period when you could talk with the teachers and get advice and guidance. There should be a smoother transition"—Another young learning disabled adult adds—"There should have been two or three years where we were a little sheltered, too".

The graduates of the Wordblind Institute sometimes return to seek guidance or support from social workers or teachers. Other learning disabled students do not have such opportunities. Although many curators and

teachers will try to help their former students if they are called upon, it is not an established part of their responsibilities.

There is little doubt that continued support and guidance for two or three years after graduation from public school would help many learning disabled graduates make a smoother transition from school to life after school. Although most graduates are helped to find their first occupation after they leave school, more than half of them change jobs or occupations during the first couple of years. For many graduates this is a troublesome time in life when they would have liked to turn to their teachers or counselors from their previous school for support. It would be easier for a graduate to turn to his former teacher for advice and support when he encounters problems, than to come in contact with an unknown person in the unfamiliar social system. Also a teacher or curator who has known the young person for some time probably will be able to give the student the necessary guidance or support for him to cope with his present problems. Sometimes a little help at the right time is needed to achieve this.

Therefore, the effort to expand the responsibility of the curator or teacher for learning disabled young people to a follow-through period of 2-3 years should be intensified. This responsibility should include an open invitation to the graduates to return to their teachers for help when they want it. Also the teacher should contact the graduates on occasion during the first few years past graduation to demonstrate a continued interest in their situation and to remind them about their availability for support and guidance.

**Support to the Learning Disabled Adults**

Once former learning disabled students are settled after their transition from school to adulthood most of them are ready to continue their struggle to cope with learning problems. As mentioned previously special education programs for adults with learning problems are available for everyone. They are found as an alternative to the regular adult education programs or at the Wordblind Institute or the Institute for Speech and Language Disorders.

In spite of this and in spite of the general knowledge about specific learning problems and dyslexia many learning disabled adults still feel uncomfortable about revealing their learning problems and try hard to hide them. In a recent television program about dyslexia, "The Hidden Handicap," adult persons described embarrassment about their learning problems and painful ways of hiding them. The television program was produced to disseminate information about learning disabilities. It focused on the problems learning disabilities may cause in daily life situations for about 5 per cent of the Danish population, about special education that might help people overcome or cope with their learning problems, and about the need of people with specific problems to find understanding and support from others.

A countrywide campaign has followed the TV program, providing information on how and where to find special remedial programs for learning disabled persons of all ages. A large number of adults responded to the TV program and signed up for courses. Among them was an unusually large number of people with severe learning problems, proving that public information television is an important tool for disemination.

**Conclusion**

In Denmark continued special education programs are available free of cost for anyone, who feels the need to participate in them. Thus learning disabled adults may continue to improve their academic skills for as long as there is a need. However, a learning disabled person must take the initiative to take advantage of the available opportunities.

Possibly the most important effect of TV and radio programs is helping learning disabled people to accept their own problems so that others might accept and understand them as well. If a person cannot accept his own learning disability it is difficult for others to accept them. When a person has enough self confidence to openly describe his difficulties, he or she is much more likely to find understanding and support from other people. Often the attempts to constantly hide the specific problems make life more difficult for a person than the problems themselves. Surely this is true generally, but during young adulthood when the transition from school life to adult life takes place, all young people are particularly dependent upon the peer group. Therefore young learning disabled adults seem to have strong needs to belong to a group of other learning disabled young people. The youngsters who made the radio program concluded with much emphasis that they needed a place (school) of their own,—not a mainstreamed program.

Several social or contact groups for young learning disabled adults have been started in recent years. Such groups offer the possibilities for the learning disabled adults to meet, to identify with each other, to share problems and to exchange ideas about how they might be solved or dealt with.

The learning disabled adults can only expect to meet understanding and help from their environment if they are prepared to discuss openly the "hidden handicap", how it affects functioning in certain areas and how people in their job or family may be helfpul. On the other hand the more the general population knows about learning disabilities, the easier it becomes for learning disabled persons to be open about their problems.

During the most vulnerable transition period from school to adult life a more active support service should be offered to help learning disabled people develop enough self-confidence to cope with their problems effectively. In short, to the continued special education programs should be added the possibilities of receiving support from professionals as well as from peer groups. Learning disabled persons should be helped to greater openess about

their problems, but the level of information in the society should be improved. The motto should be "We *can* —but we need help".

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## EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL ISSUES: LEARNING DISABLED ADULTS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

by Ulrich Bleidick

### Definitional Context

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the notion of "learning disability" is viewed as a descriptive concept for school organizational purposes: learning disabled (LD) students are those who receive education in a school for learning disabled students. Schools for learning disabled students are one of several categories of special schools. Others serve the needs of mentally retarded, speech impaired, physically disabled or ill, behavior disordered, blind or visually impaired, and hearing impaired or deaf students.

As a criterion for placement in a special school, the concept "learning disability" involves three characteristics:

- achievement levels delayed by at least two years compared to average agemates, notably in the main subjects of German (reading, spelling, vocabulary) and arithmetic;
- serious, relatively enduring, and broad reductions in learning ability, diagnosed by an intelligence testing procedure (on average, one standard deviation below the mean, i.e., IQ 85);
- evidence of non-educability in the regular school, ascertained through previous coaching and supportive measures.

Children attending learning disability schools satisfy the nine-year general education requirement of compulsory attendance for ages 6-15. Total school attendance is usually extended today to a 10th year on a voluntary basis. From ages 15-18 years, general vocational education is compulsory and is provided either in special vocational classes or in regular vocational schools along with industrial apprenticeship training. In 1980 about 4% of students ages 6-15 were placed in schools for learning disabled students, although percentages differ regionally within a range of 1-5%.

### School Education of the Learning Disabled

The overall educational objective of schools for learning disabled students is to provide adequate education to students with substantial learning deficits. This general and open statement of objective has various implications. First, on principle, the function of educating students with learning difficulties is not assigned to the special education sphere to the exclusion of other locations in the school system. Hence, a flexible system of elaborate programs could, under certain circumstances, take over the functions presently incumbent on the separate special school system.

The category "learning disability" is a relative one, the above definition notwithstanding; it depends on the ability of the regular schools to accommodate deviations in learning behavior. Thus, the educational, as well as the sociopolitical role of the LD schools is embedded in a broader societal context

which seeks to promote educational gains for many different members of our society who function at lower levels. Educational approaches in learning disability schools therefore are not as well-defined in profile as those in, say, schools for the blind or physically disabled. The LD schools are intended to pool all those who cannot cope with regular school requirements.

Throughout the history of special education, attempts have been made to link learning disability to some well-defined functional defect. Attempts to trace learning disability to genetic determinants, brain physiology, traumatic factors, to socio-cultural neglect, social-class-specific conditions and so on have remained ineffective, since contributive causes, as a rule, overlap in a process of bio-social accumulation (Kanter/Speck, 1980). Moreover, differentiating etiological groups of learning disability has failed to produce effective, diverse teaching designs. Therefore, a goal-oriented disability concept now prevails in the Federal Republic. This goal-oriented principle means increasingly setting aside any medical criteria in defining those who need social and educational assistance (Bleidick, 1984). As a curriculum organizer, this goal orientation means providing a highly differentiated, flexible range of methods for helping the learning disabled counter their learning problems and develop their potential.

The learning disability schools carry out their educational mandate by providing a range of supportive measures. Class composition is not based on chronological age but on achievement level, thus limiting excessive variations in performance and establishing homogeneous instructional groups. Outwardly, this differentiation may take the form of a two-tier school structure with remedial classrooms for students with behavior problems, speech impairments, or dyslexia, as well as alternative participation in mainstreamed courses, for instance, in mathematics.

**Alternative Routes to an Educational Degree**

A crucially important aspect of organizational flexibility is the extension of school attendance to a voluntary 10th year. This added year offers two valuable possibilities: possible attainment of 9th grade standards by students who, at regular school-leaving age, were making progress but fell short of the standard; and possible qualifying "in retrospect" for the ordinary school-leaving certificate of the "Hauptschule."

This possibility, in particular, is an essential step towards rehabilitating the learning disabled young adult. Three different, though mutually complementary routes have been adopted by various federal agencies to help this qualifying "in retrospect." First, learning disabled students may qualify in retrospect by attending specially provided courses at the "Hauptschule" itself. Alternatively, they may attend two-year courses at the special school and then participate in the regular exit exams of the "Hauptschule."

The third and most promising avenue to a "Hauptschule" certificate is developing at the linkage point between general and vocational education. Many facilities providing vocational services to disabled youth have begun to

include courses which prepare students for the ordinary school-leaving certificate, sometimes making use of courses such as those funded by the Federal Institute of Employment. Finally, successful completion of training in a recognized training profession implies retrospective acquisition of the ordinary school-leaving certificate.

In these ways, roughly 20-30% of learning disabled are helped to attain a social standing that places them, at least formally, on an equal footing with non-disabled young adults opening up greater options for their future. A criticism which needs to be added, however, is that these programs imply "rehabilitation for an elite." This sociopolitical approach clearly remains unsatisfactory for the greater numbers of learning disabled persons—the remaining 70-80 percent.

### Special Characteristics and Needs of LD Learners

Goals for children and youth with learning difficulties are, in essence, the same as for students in regular schools, since we all share the same world with its cultural patterns and elements, economic constraints, technological problems and political tasks. The learning disabled student, however, may be characterized psychologically by different styles of learning, and differing needs for moving toward those goals.

Learning disability, from an information processing perspective, can be considered a learning variant, sometimes an extreme variant in terms of learning time, capacity, concept formation and transfer. Thus, learning disabled individuals proceed more slowly, may learn less, may remember less and forget more easily. They often need more illustrative-concrete, motor and application-oriented subjects and situations and often need help establishing correspondences and transfering what has been learned to novel and unfamiliar circumstances or applying knowledge in new settings.

Teaching methods used with learning disabled students do not differ fundamentally from those considered valid in regular educational programs. Essential, however, is that these "best-practice" methods be carried out in a careful and conscientious manner. "Precision" instruction, involving a high degree of sequencing, is considered crucial. Interwined with this careful sequencing is the principle of isolating specific difficulties and providing a high level of task repetition. Intensive practice and continuous repetition strengthen the skills acquired. New understanding and skills are most easily developed through concrete and direct experiences with objects and situations. Thus, optimally, instruction is based on imaginative, colorful, captivating, and direct-handling presentation, including overall sensory experience. Newly acquired skills are reinforced by many practical applications.

### Vocational Education and Training of Learning Disabled Youth

*Pre-vocational Services*

Given post-war economic revival in the Federal Republic of Germany, with its then expanding economy and manpower shortages, full employ-

ment became available for people with learning disabilities, albeit often in unskilled jobs at lower levels of the occupational hierarchy. Accordingly, the learning disabled population seemed largely able to cope successfully with the world of adulthood. Only a minority of learning disabled youth with additional social disadvantage had notable difficulties, such as excessive unemployment, frequent job change, or increased risk of delinquency.

This picture has undergone fundamental changes over the past six to eight years. In the wake of economic recession, the effectiveness of educating learning disabled children in special schools has become a matter of increasing doubt because, today, the vast majority of school-leavers can neither secure apprenticeship training nor find adequate open employment. They emerge from vocational school without any occupational opportunity (Kloas/ Stenger, 1980).

The implications of this situation are twofold: first, services relating to career education and subsequent vocational preparation require substantial up-grading. Due to higher demands and increased selectiveness in industry, often learning disabled students will not be ready for career education or vocational training when they complete compulsory general education. About three-quarters of these young people, therefore, attend prevocational programs before embarking on formal vocational training. Interestingly, this extension of the general and vocational education periods constitutes a manpower-policy tool for keeping the young people away from the labor market, thus statistically adjusting the high youth unemployment figures (Bleidick/ Ellger-Ruttgardt, 1982).

Career education and pre-vocational services are assigned to different facilities and separate stages. Curricula in the upper grades of the school for the learning disabled young adult emphasize work-related career-educational studies, which include technical, business and social subjects. Industrial visits and work experience begin at grade 8 for orientation to relevant job and occupational areas. Though career guidance is formally the province of the local employment offices of the Federal Institute of Employment, meaningful assistance requires close cooperation between school, employment office, and parents. Services include occupational information published by the Federal Institute, group talks at school, individual interviews with career guidance officers and at occupational information centers of the employment offices (Bundesanstalt fur Arbeit, 1979).

Pre-vocational services may be obtained through two differently funded programs administered either by the state Ministries of Education, or by the Federal Institute of Employment. Within the regular vocational schools, the Education Ministries provide courses introducing young people with disabilities, or lacking in vocational maturity, to one or two occupational fields. The one- or two-year courses available through the Federal Institute are carried out at vocational training centers and are geared to differing levels of need. Basic vocational training courses are intended for school-leavers who, due to shortages in industrial apprenticeship training, have so far been unable to

enter formal training. Promotional courses are designed to prepare young people who lack vocational maturity for apprentice training in a recognized training profession. In recent years, some 50% of the learning disabled school-leavers have participated in such courses. There are also courses for improving placement opportunities. These are intended to help lower-functioning young people attain sufficient on-the-job skills to secure unskilled employment.

The effectiveness of this close-knit network of preparatory vocational services is difficult to assess because better qualified young people are also keen on entering these programs. Despite this competition, a majority of learning disabled youth is provided with a stepping stone for entering vocational training proper. Unfortunately, prospects for their completing such training and subsequently obtaining permanent open employment must, in the light of the current structural crisis in our economy, be viewed as rather gloomy.

**Vocational Training and Social Integration**

Formal vocational training for learning disabled young people is obtained either through the open apprenticeship market or in vocational training centers. Current high competition due to shortages in industrial training opportunities places special youth groups (such as the disabled, "Hauptschule" leavers, and foreign-nationality applicants) at a disadvantage, which has meant that increasing numbers turn to the vocational centers.

Vocational training centers are off-the-job interregional institutions, started in 1969 pursuant to the Employment Promotion Act and the federal government's Action Program for advancing the rehabilitation of disabled persons. Initially jointly financed by federal and state governments, the centers were subsequently transferred to non-governmental administrations who now run them. Throughout the Federal Republic of Germany, 37 such centers provide a total of 10,000 places; some 7,000 of these are intended for learning disabled trainees which means that only about 5% of this population can obtain training there. Central to these centers' conceptual approach is the provision under one roof of comprehensive social-educational assistance—social services, medical, psychological care, recreational activities, along with specific vocational training.

The remaining majority of learning disabled young people must manage within the dual system of industrial apprenticeship training and vocational education schools. It is presumed that a minority fail to manage in either the dual system or the vocational training center. These young people turn to the workshops for disabled people so that, again, competitive factors begin to operate in this case to the disadvantage of the mentally retarded. These sheltered environments can hardly be expected to provide adequate employment or skills training for learning disabled clients. So, again, a segment of the learning disabled population is threatened by a position of marginality due to rigid employment-political bureaucracy.

To ameliorate this situation, a specific exemption clause contained in the vocational training legislation is used. This clause authorizes the reduction of qualifying standards in the vocational training of disabled young people. These shortened two-year special training courses lead to recognized part-time or semi-skilled occupations, instead of the more standard occupations requiring three years of training (for instance, service station aide instead of fully qualified service-station attendant).

Trade unions are certainly not totally wrong, though, in criticizing abuse of exemption clauses, as these have been utilized to introduce "near-minimum" wage groups and less qualified manpower. On-going discussions of these divergent concerns highlight the fact that vocational and social integration issues should not be handled in an all-or-nothing manner. It remains an issue for debate whether we should be satisfied with stopping half-way in securing educational services for people with disabilties, when the aim of full rehabilitation may be unattainable. Partial solutions represent what seems currently possible; should this mean that we restrict our thinking to these partial responses within a clearly difficult current situation, not conceiving possibilities beyond? A related debate is whether the forum of existing partial solutions should restrict us from considering how to proceed in the future.

**The Societal Context for Learning Disabilities**

Impaired intellectual function, specifically mental retardation and learning disabilities, account for the greatest share of educationally relevant disablement. Their share of the overall school-age handicapped population exceeds the combined shares of all other disabilities. This seems to result from the fact that intellectual deficits and social marginality overlap to a great extent and are mutually contingent.

It seems likely that to the degree that a society allows privation, social neglect, and cultural deprivation to occur in minority groups, to that same degree will the incidence of impaired intellectual functioning increase. Just as underdeveloped early language, unsatisfied emotional needs, and insufficient overall mental stimulation are especially noticeable in socially underpriviledged groups, so too, impaired intellectual functioning will always be associated with sociocultural disadvantage. This may explain the wide variations found in the incidence of learning disability in different cultures. When viewed from an international perspective, differing school-organizational approaches to the issues of how to care for children with poor cognitive performance will probably turn out to differ widely, being more exclusionary or more integrative depending on the inherent societal patterns of the community.

Special education thinking in the Federal Republic of Germany currently focuses less on special schools and much more on the socio-psychological task of improving the social standing of the LD students, who are most seriously and, in view of their potential, most unjustly exposed to negative societal attitudes and prejudice. From this viewpoint, mainstreaming con-

siderations are most certainly justified on sociopolitical grounds, *provided that the necessary supportive services are established within the regular school system.*

The by now two centuries old special education system in Germany has in recent years been criticized and there have been increasing calls for a reorientation of special education within regular education. The current debate is characterized by the concepts of separate versus integrated schooling; the special school as an independent self-contained institution is confronted with the importance of integrating disabled and non-disabled students and with the argument that such integration is of value to *both* groups. The call for integrated programming is reflected in the recommendation of the Education Commission within the German Education Council entitled "On the Educational Care of Children and Youth with Disabilities or at Risk of Becoming Disabled" (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1973). This recommendation expressly states that equal weight should be accorded the disabled person's right to individualized services and his/her integration within mainstream society. Such integration-focused thinking is not restricted to special education; vocational training institutions have also been remonstrated for restricting possibilities for social integration by retaining clients too long within a protective setting.

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# CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH & ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES—1985

by Cathy Smith

## Introduction

Although young people and adults with learning disabilities have been with us at least throughout this century, they were not formally identified as such or viewed as an important population until 1963 when parents and professionals banded together to form the Association for Children (and Adults*) with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) in Canada and the United States. Initial energies of the association were directed almost exclusively towards increasing awareness among educators and establishing services within the education system. Only as the first wave of identified children reached adulthood has the chronic nature of learning disabilities become more fully recognized, and with that has come awareness of our society's acute lack of resources for adults. In 1979, a Canadian ACLD Task Force was funded by the Federal Department of Health & Welfare to survey the needs of the learning disabled in Canada. The Task Force reported:

> "In each city of this country the Task Force Committee listened to loud public outcries, and at times, outrage over the negligence concerning appropriate planning for young adults with special needs...It should, therefore, not be surprising to learn that very young adults drop out in anger and frustration and that some turn to delinquent behavior or remain on welfare for long periods of their lives.
>
> The realization that school problems will now become serious life problems is too much for some people to take. The article, *Frustration Unto Death* (Jones, 1977) described feelings and thoughts of a learning disabled teenager who committed suicide and resulted in Associations for Children with Learning Disabilities across the Country receiving thousands of desperate calls for help from parents recognizing that their children were living a similar scenario." (From Task Force Report *They Are Not Alone*, CACLD, Ottawa, 1979).

The frustrations of people with learning disabilities arise in large measure from lack of understanding—their own, and that of others. Many LD adults have never been identified as learning disabled, and therefore, don't understand why certain things are so difficult for them to learn or to do; in a very crucial way they don't understand themselves. When other people don't understand, typical assumptions are that the person with learning disabilities is lazy, stupid, unmotivated and doesn't care—serious misunderstandings which often have disastrous consequences.

This paper outlines the major barriers faced by young people with

*"and Adults" was added to the name of the Canadian Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (CALD) in 1983.

learning disabilities as they attempt to make the transition from school to work and to adult autonomy, and also describes major Canadian service delivery systems which do or *could* assist with these adult transitions.

The Canadian ACLD is committed to ensuring that every learning disabled person has the opportunity to become a productive participating member of society through satisfactory careers, social relationships and a sense of control over their lives. The Canadian Government shares this commitment to programs which work toward these goals. Under its amended act which became effective April 1985, the Canadian Human Rights Commission offers protection against discrimination in employment and in the provision of goods, services and accommodations for persons with mental disability—including learning disability. Also, the Report of the Special Parliamentary Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped (Obstacles, 1981), lists learning disabilities as one of the six major handicapping conditions faced by Canadians, and offers recommendations for surmounting obstacles often encountered by learning disabled people. An important outcome of this Report was the establishment of the Disabled Persons Employment Directorate. Unfortunately, since its inception in 1981, the Directorate has been understaffed and underfunded and, therefore, is unable to perform its proper function.

In considering the service needs of learning disabled adults, it is logical that the amount and types of services will be dictated by the type and severity of the disabilities. A large number of LD adults are likely to choose careers which use their strengths and interface minimally with their deficits, thereby creating satisfying lives for themselves. In order to make successful adult transitions, others require some assistance, ranging from minimal and transitory to intensive. A small percentage of learning disabled people, unable to cope effectively as independent adults, may need long-term supervised living and employment facilities. Unfortunately, there are no such facilities in Canada at this time.

### Barriers to Success for Learning Disabled People

In a 1984 Royal Commission Report, *Equality in Employment*, Judge Abella estimated the unemployment rate of handicapped adults to be 50 percent or more. He outlined major barriers facing women, native Canadians, disabled persons and visible minorities in Canada today: insufficient or inappropriate education and training facilities; inadequate information systems about training and employment opportunities; no voice in the decision-making process within programs affecting them; employers' restrictive recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices; and discriminatory assumptions. Clearly, these barriers also significantly affect the learning disabled.

*Education Barriers:*

In Canada, education increasingly determines one's job opportunities. There is tremendous variability between Provinces and Territories in the

degree to which a child has a right to be educated, resulting in geographically based discrimination against some children. The Canadian constitution prohibits the Federal Government from legislating educational matters. Because of these factors, the Canadian ACLD believes that the right to be educated to one's fullest potential needs to become part of the Canadian Human Rights Act, thus ensuring that the Provinces make their respective Education Acts similarly nondiscriminatory. Without such guarantees, children are often misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all; they are often channelled into non-academic streams and placed in vocational high school settings, still without the attention their specific learning deficits require.

Many teacher training programs do not include a significant focus on learning disabilities; many teachers are not equipped to deal with the 10-15% of their students who will present symptoms of learning disabilities. Few high school programs offer a sound preparation for the world of work, so students entering the workforce have great difficulty securing and maintaining jobs.

CALD recently surveyed 300 universities and colleges in Canada to determine the level of support offered to learning disabled students. While responses indicated that only three have a relevant policy and/or personnel, most of the 56% who responded indicated willingness to offer accommodations on an ad hoc basis. Most colleges will admit applicants as "mature students," providing some LD adults an opportunity to start again without going back through the high school system as an entry pre-requisite. The net result is that some accommodations can sometimes be arranged for some academic weaknesses: extra time for writing exams and completing course works, taping lectures, taking exams orally, etc. Unfortunately, many other serious needs of those with poor social skills, organizational deficits and/or emotional scars are not served by such an ad hoc and narrowly-based approach.

*Barriers to Job Training:*

Young people who do not go on to post-secondary education may receive job training in a program sponsored by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission. This training is often offered in collaboration with the Community College network. The application process is treacherous for many LD adults, requiring the filling in of application forms and aptitude testing. For the learning disabled, it is imperative that those who administer such programs focus intensively on those aptitudes and abilities needed for the *essential* functions of the job, together with an acceptance of accommodative measures for the non-essential functions.

Tremendous growth in the number of regulated trades in the past 20 years has closed more and more employment opportunities to learning disabled people as apprenticeship programs, developed in conjunction with the Community College network, have required entry pre-requisites of high-school learning. An extreme example of this needless exclusion was a

Community College course which led to certification as a golf-course assistant. The job description was "to work under the direction of a grounds supervisor." The ad hoc accommodations mentioned earlier can only come into play *after* a student has been accepted into such a college apprenticeship program, and thereby many LD adults are effectively barred from suitable job training programs because of weak academic skills—skills not required by the job.

The position of CACLD is that there are no specific occupations suitable for adults with learning disabilities. With appropriate accommodation for their particular learning needs, LD adults can prepare for and undertake a wide variety of jobs. This basic principle is difficult to grasp when specific disabilities are equated with overall *in*ability. Such misunderstanding is a major barrier to LD adults as they attempt to secure job skills training.

One option which seems suited to this population is on-the-job training which can be arranged through an Employment Centre, with financial incentives offered to the employer. However, there is such a plethora of such programs that it is almost impossible for the consumer to be aware of them. Additionally, one must hope for a miracle to get past the application process and become linked with a counsellor sensitive to learning disabilities. The Employment and Immigration Commission has just begun to develop in-service training materials to help their personnel better respond to the needs of the learning disabled.

*Barriers to Participation:*

Disabled adults have rarely been included in the decision-making process of programs affecting them. Judge Abella cited this lack as one of the significant barriers to the integration of disabled people into the workforce. At a major national meeting held in November 1984, numerous groups protested that no consumer organizations had been invited to a federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting. While dialogue and consultation have increased somewhat since then, consumer groups often find themselves invited to governmental committee meetings on very short notice, with no financial support for summoning the most appropriate representative or collecting data for their presentations.

*Employment Barriers:*

Assuming that a learning diabled person has surmounted the aforementioned obstacles and has the education and training necessary for a job, the last hurdle is to find and maintain employment and to have equal access to advancement. A CACLD survey of the top 100 Canadian Corporations was undertaken recently to determine the level of awareness of learning disabilities, as well as corporate hiring policies. While the level of awareness and accommodation was very low, 50% of those responding requested information, workshops, or indicated their intention to attend one of the two 1985 National Symposiums on Employment Strategies being sponsored by CACLD. This is a hopeful sign that the business community may become

more active partners in the process of integrating disabled people fully into the workplace. It is a beginning.

Many of the discriminatory assumptions made about LD adults have been pointedly described in a special issue of the *Journal of Rehabilitation* (Kopp, Miller, & Mulkey, 1984):

1. Intelligent people are good readers. Poor readers are not very intelligent.
2. Highly motivated people set goals, develop plans, and make effective use of their time. People who have few goals, are disorganized, and do not use time wisely are unmotivated and generally lazy.
3. The ability to concentrate on a task and learn quickly is an indication of a high level of intelligence. People who are easily distracted and learn slowly are not capable of learning very much.
4. People who care about those around them are sensitive to the needs of others. People who are not perceptive of others' feelings do not really care about the needs of other people.

These attitudes need to be dispelled in order for learning disabled people to have equal access to jobs, job training, and job advancement opportunities. Our limited research indicates that to date in Canada those learning disabled adults who have made it in the workforce have done so with very minimal adjustments being made at the workplace.

The services outlined so far offer only minimal and transitory intervention. More is needed—more understanding, more responsiveness, and more consistent supports. A small percentage of learning disabled people require extensive rehabilitation in preparation for the workplace, in post-secondary educational or job-training programs. Under the Canadian system, rehabilitation services come under provincial/territorial jurisdiction, and therefore are inconsistent in policy and application. Attention to the issue of rehabilitation services for LD adults is rare and there is as yet little recognition that the services required by this population need to be tailored to their particular learning needs.

A major obstacle for all has been the lack of a clear, functional definition of learning disabilities (Cruickshank, 1984), lack of valid diagnostic tools, and lack of access to diagnostic evaluations. Learning disabled people who need help are often the very ones who cannot afford the high cost of psychoeducational assessment.

**Vocational Rehabilitation for People with Learning Disabilities**

Currently, there are only four Canadian rehabilitation programs for learning disabled adults, operating in four different provinces and each funded differently. All are patterned loosely on a Career Preparation Program developed by the author (Smith, 1983) which currently operates at the Chisholm Educational Centre, a private institution in Oakville, Ontario. LD adults at Chisholm may receive funding from Vocational Rehabilitation Serv-

ices, a part of the provincial ministry of Community and Social Services which purchases, rather than provides, services. This funding mechanism is available in most provinces/territories, but at this time few programs have been developed and there is little awareness of what programs should provide.

At Chisholm, clients are served in groups of 5-8 and attend a 34-week program which consists of four major components: academic remediation, vocational guidance, social skills training, and critical thinking development. Additionally, the program focuses on relaxation, learning disabilities classes, values clarification, group counselling, and social interaction.

Academic remediation in language arts and math is an individualized program which addresses the particular needs and learning style of each person, with a "strategies" approach (Alley & Deschler, 1979) designed to facilitate optimal use of skills for vocational success.

Vocational guidance follows a traditional curriculum, but emphasizes identifying careers which make use of the client's strengths and developing strategies to overcome or compensate for deficits. Helping these clients to set realistic goals, to take responsiblity for their performance, to know when and how to ask appropriately for accommodations is a slow process. Part of the process involves a work placement in the community, with self-assessments and feedback from the employer.

Social skill deficits have been identified as a more significant barrier to successful employment for LD adults than academic deficits (Kronick, 1981). At Chisholm, social skills are taught using a structured learning approach (Goldstein, Sprazkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 1980), with discussion time relating the skill deficits to specific learning disabilities, and the need for cognitive strategies to compensate for processing deficits. Additionally, group counselling provides a forum for dealing with the emotional scars which so often result from years of frustration and failure.

The LD course teaches the clients about learning disabilities, helping them to understand their own difficulties, and to learn effective ways of dealing with these. Crucial to their future success is taking responsibility for their own behavior, even that caused by their learning disabilities.

Critical thinking skills are taught using Edward de Bono's *Cort Program (1973)* which trains clarity and breadth of perspective, helping to overcome the impulsive, disorganized behaviors so often associated with learning disabilities.

Results of the program with the first two groups who have graduated indicate that it helps LD adults, previously unable to get or keep jobs, to develop realistic career goals and skills to reach those goals. While such a program is expensive to operate because of the duration and low staff/client ratio, it shows promise of helping clients become autonomous, productive members of society. The alternatives are to allow them to remain unemployed, on disability pension, or even in conflict with the law. It does not

seem like an expensive proposition when compared with these alternatives.

In Canada, the future prospects for youth with learning disabilities seem brighter today than ever before because of the increasing awareness of their needs and the growing recognition of their potential. There remains the ongoing and still enormous job of ensuring that this awareness and understanding permeate all levels of our society's systems – schools, colleges, universities, employment centres and programs, and rehabilitation services. It is these systems, these networks, which are capable of responding to the needs of LD adults in ways that can make a lifetime difference.

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- Have You Ever Known a Perceptually Handicapped Adult? An Exploration with Suggestions for Employers and Spouses by Lauriel Anderson
- "Problems and Issues Facing Canadian Youth" Brief submitted to the Special Senate Committee on Youth, August 1984.
- "Employment of People with Learning Disabilities" Brief submitted to the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission, December 1984.
- "Canadian Human Rights and Learning Disabilities" Brief submitted to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

# THE LONG-TERM PROGNOSIS OF CHILDHOOD LEARNING DISABILITIES: A VIEW FROM CANADA

by Margaret Bruck

## Introduction

A growing body of data shows that childhood learning disabilities LD persist and constitute a lifelong condition; adults with childhood diagnoses of LD continue to exhibit reading, spelling, and math problems (Bruck, 1985a). Professional concern for these persisting academic deficits is often accompanied by a parallel concern that learning disabilities may signal serious long-term adjustment problems affecting educational and occupational achievements as well as social and emotional functioning. Thus, of late many professionals have urged the establishment of comprehensive programs addressing the lifelong learning and adjustment needs of this exceptional population. Before such comprehensive programs are undertaken, it seems important to document the needs, the numbers, and the characteristics of those LD adults who may require specialized services. Data from follow-up studies of adults with childhood LD diagnoses can assist in this process. This paper reviews four follow-up studies, each of which offers valuable perspectives on the educational, occupational, and psychosocial status of LD adults.

These particular studies were selected because they overcome at least five major criticisms recently leveled at studies of the long-term effects of childhood learning disabilities (Bruck, 1985a; Herjanic & Penick, 1972; Schonhaut & Satz, 1984). First, for each of these four studies, the size of the LD and control groups was adequate. Second, at the time of interview, subjects were no longer attending compulsory schooling and thus were considered adults; the average age of subjects in each study ranged from 18 to 33 years. Third, these studies were broad in scope, including comprehensive data on educational and occupational achievements and, in two of the studies, data concerning social and emotional adjustments. Since recent research has focused on social and emotional problems in LD children (see review by Ceci, in press), it is important whether, or to what degree, such problems persist beyond the childhood years.

Fourth, confounding factors such as neurological impairment, mental retardation, and social or cultural deprivation were ruled out in each of these studies. Many other follow-up studies do not separate out subjects with borderline IQs, psychiatric symptoms or neurologic impairments, or those from lower class backgrounds and thus, subsequent outcomes may reflect these factors and not the learning disability per se. Lastly, the four studies selected for this discussion provided information about the *severity* of the childhood learning disability and, in the main, examined the association between the severity of LD in childhood and subsequent adult functioning. Severity data are critical to our understanding of the characteristics of LD adults who need specialized services.

**Description of Subjects in the Four Studies**

**Rawson's Study.** Rawson (1968) followed 20 LD boys who attended a private elementary school which provided auxilliary remedial reading. At follow-up, the average age was 33 years. Rawson's subjects demonstrated severe and moderate childhood disabilities: all had failed to learn to read by grade 2 or 3. They scored above average IQs ($\bar{x}$ = 130) and evidenced no neurological or emotional problems. Their upper middle class parents were involved both in the overall education of their children and in the operation of the school. At follow-up, the occupational and educational status of the LD subjects was compared with 20 of their classmates who had not had academic difficulties.

**Childs' Study.** Childs and his colleagues (Childs, Finucci, Pulver & Tielsch, 1982; Gottfredson, Finucci & Childs, 1983) followed 472 boys who attended a residential private school for LD adolescents. Average age at follow-up was 33. All subjects had long histories of school failure, despite normal IQs ($\bar{x}$ = 118) and no neurological, sensory or overriding emotional disorders. An estimated seventy-five percent of the sample was severely disabled when they entered the school at age 14. Families were white-collar professionals who provided support and understanding, as may be inferred from their having sent their children to this special school. The educational and occupational outcomes of the LD subjects were contrasted with a control group of 368 age-matched men who had attended a private, college-preparatory day school.

**Spreen's Study.** Spreen (1981, 1982, 1983, personal communication) followed a sample of both boys and girls originally assessed at a university neuropsychology clinic when they were 8-12 years of age. Despite early diagnosis, these children subsequently received little intensive or special treatment for their learning disabilities. First followed up at a mean age of 18.5 years, they were recently reassessed at a mean age of 25. Of Spreen's three subgroups, the one with marked learning difficulties but with no neurological indicators is of interest in this present discussion. They were of average IQ ($\bar{x}$ = 99) and were from lower middle class backgrounds. Forty-three from this subgroup comprised the first follow-up, 27 the second. Their social and emotional functioning, as well as educational and occupational achievements, were compared to a group of normally-achieving students matched for sex, age, and social status.

**Bruck's Study.** Bruck (1985a, 1985b) followed 101 boys and girls assessed between the ages of 5 and 10 at a hospital-university LD clinic. At follow-up, average age was 21; approximately half were late adolescents (17-21 years) and half young adults (22-29 years). Most of the subjects received some type of specialized help during their school years. In addition, the LD clinic provided all parents with counselling sessions concerning the nature of their child's problems.

Primarily from middle class backgrounds (6% from lower class), they evidenced normal IQs ($\bar{x}$ = 103), showed no primary behavioral or emotional

disturbance, and were free of neurological or sensory impairment. Forty-three percent were severely disabled, 31% moderately, and 27% mildly disabled. At follow-up, their literacy skills and social-emotional functioning, as well as their educational and occupational achievements, were compared to two control groups. The first control group consisted of non-LD peers matched for sex, age, and social status. According to local and national norms, this group's academic and occupational achievements were atypically high and thus, another control of non-LD siblings, matched for sex, age and social status, was compared on educational and occupational achievements.

**Results of the Four Studies**

*Academic Outcomes*

It is a common belief that LD children are at risk for high-school drop-out. Only Spreen's results supported this hypothesis; 62% of his LD subjects (vs 2% of the control subjects) dropped out of high school. The drop-out rates for the other three studies were low: 0%, 6%, and 10%, respectively.

Except for the Spreen study, most LD subjects entered college after finishing high school.

| | Rawson | Childs | Bruck | Spreen |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Completed High School | 100% | 94% | 90% | 38% |
| Entered College | 100% | 81% | 58% | 12% |
| Of those who entered, % who attained BA degrees and went on the Graduate Programs | 77% | 15% | 73% | unknown |

**LD Academic Outcomes**

According to Bruck, the LD college students had to work particularly hard to function well in a university program. Reading complex prose, writing reports, and taking timed exams, presented particular difficulties. An especially high proportion of LD college students took reduced academic loads (31% in the Bruck study and 33% in the Childs study) and thus required an additional year to complete their college program.

Bruck and Rawson found similar patterns and rates of educational achievement for the LD and controls, while Spreen and Childs reported poorer achievements for the LD than for the control group. In Child's study, group differences appear to reflect the exceptionally high achievement of a select control group rather than the poor functioning of the LD subjects. Thus, in three of the four studies LD subjects were moderately successful in terms of their educational achievements (see Balow and Blomquist, 1965; Preston & Yarrington, 1967; Robinson & Smith, 1962 for similar findings). The high rate of high school failure in the Spreen study may reflect specific subject characteristics. For example, poor achievement could be accounted for by social class differences as was the case in Bruck's study which found

that all subjects from lower class backgrounds either dropped out of high school or did not continue beyond. In addition to social class differences, Spreen's study was also characterized by subjects with lower IQs and by a scarcity of childhood LD services. It seems likely that negative consequences of learning disabilities become compounded with lack of opportunity and restricted social mobility. Conversely, factors such as strong family support and understanding, adequate intelligence levels, and adequate intervention programs may affect the relationship between childhood learning disabilities and educational achievement (see Childs, 1982, for further discussion).

*Occupational Achievements*

The data from only one study supported the hypothesis that LD children will end up disproportionally in the ranks of the unemployed. Unemployment rates were 0% (Rawson), 6% (Childs), 11% (Bruck), and 46% (Spreen). There were no differences between the unemployment rates for LD and control subjects, except in the Spreen study.

Conclusions about occupational status were quite consistent across three of the studies. For example, in Child's study, comparisons with census data indicated that the LD subjects were often in the most prestigious occupations and were seldom found in those lower groups employing 67% of all adult white men. Additionally Childs found that LD men were more likely to be in managerial (president, vice-president) or in sales positions requiring good communication skills, while control men were more likely to be doctors and lawyers, jobs which require higher levels of education and literacy.

While Bruck and Rawson also found many LD adults in upper level occupations, they did not find this between-group difference on the professional-managerial dimension. In Spreen's study, occupational achievements were lower: 56% of the subjects were unskilled laborers compared to an average of 10% in the other three studies. In general, these data indicate that LD adults are gainfully employed, often in prestigious occupations. Although many do not become lawyers or doctors, they achieve considerable success through other channels (see also Preston & Yarrington, 1967; Robinson & Smith, 1962).

*Levels of Literacy Skills*

Only one study (Bruck 1985a) focused on the literacy skills of LD adults. Compared with a college control group, LD subjects performed poorly on standardized tests of reading comprehension, reading speed, single word decoding, spelling, and math. Reading comprehension was the most intact skill; deficits were most apparent for single-word decoding and spelling skills.

Although these data indicate that learning disabilities persist into adulthood, interpretation must be tempered by several qualifications. First, subjects somehow compensated for basic word recognition deficits and achieved adequate levels of comprehension. Secondly, even though the subjects showed difficutly in certain areas, most had sufficient skills to meet the literacy demands of both higher education and skilled professional environ-

ments. Finally, both Childs and Bruck report that by most standards the subjects were literate; Bruck estimated that only 6% of her sample might be considered illiterate (test scores below the grade 6 level). Of particular note is the fact that *schooling* appeared to result in improved skill, at least under certain circumstances. Controlling for IQ, social class, and severity of learning disability, Bruck found that those subjects who had attended school longer and were in school at follow-up did better on achievement tests than subjects who had less schooling and were not in school at the time of testing. Thus, intensive daily practice and exposure were associated with improved levels of literacy.

*Social and Emotional Functioning*

There are a number of important questions about the social and emotional adjustments of LD adults. Do the emotional and social problems frequently noted in LD children persist into adulthood, or are these confined to the childhood years? Are specific learning disabilities precursors of adult disorders such as juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, or poor social and emotional adjustments? What are the characteristics of LD adults most at risk for adjustment disorders? Data from the Bruck and Spreen studies are relevant to these issues.

Parents's ratings of their children's adjustment at age 18 showed that LD subjects differed from controls on only one of six dimensions of problem behavior—asocial acting out (Spreen). However, on all rating scales, LD subjects *perceived themselves* to be less socially and emotionally adjusted than the control subjects.

Clinicians' ratings of interview data, showed that LD and control subjects made similar adjustments in the areas of family relationships and interactions with the opposite sex (Bruck). However, LD subjects suffered more severe peer problems with members of the same sex; 13% of the LD subjects were lonely with few social contacts. They also suffered higher rates of poor psychological adjustment, specifically having greater difficulty controlling tempers and dealing with frustration in a constructive way.

Both Bruck and Spreen identified some characteristics of those LD adults most likely to show adjustment problems. Bruck found that adults with adjustment problems had evidenced similar problems as children. But, not all those with childhood adjustment problems were poorly adjusted as adults; over 50% of subjects with poor childhood adjustment showed *good* adjustment at follow-up. In both studies, LD female subjects experienced the poorest adjustments and, according to the Bruck data, females were more likely to show persistent childhood problems. Additionally, Bruck reported that age at follow-up was related to psychological adjustment; poor adjustments were only characteristic of the younger LD group (17-20 year olds), not of the older group (21-29). Interestingly, severity of childhood learning disability was not related to family, peer, or psychological adjustments at follow-up. Educational success was associated with improved peer relationships which may reflect greater opportunity for peer interaction in educa-

tional than in occupational settings.

The clinical significance of these social-emotional findings is not clear. Perhaps only a small proportion of LD adults show serious adjustment problems. Only 5% of the Bruck's LD sample had received recent counseling for social and emotional problems and only an estimated 15% would have been appropriate for referral for family counseling, social skills training, or individual psychotherapy. None were sufficiently disturbed as to require hospitalization.

Spreen and Bruck both concluded that childhood learning disabilities were not precursors of asocial behaviors. Bruck reported that there were no differences between LD and controls in rate of drug or alcohol abuse. In both studies, control and LD subjects did not differ in terms of the number of delinquent acts or encounters with police. Bruck found no differences in the rates of incarceration; however, Spreen reported that the LD group received somewhat more frequent and severe penalties, despite no differences in the number of offenses committed. It is possible that the more severe penalties reflect the LD subjects more inappropriate or less persuasive behavior in court. This interpretation is consistent with findings that LD children do not present a good first impression and do not ingratiate themselves with their listeners (Donahue and Bryan, 1984; Perlmutter & Bryan, 1984). Thus, their higher penalty rates could reflect poor social competence, rather than the offense itself.

To summarize, like LD children, LD adults are more likely to show adjustment problems than normal peers. The finding that severity of learning disability was not related to measures of social and emotional adjustment suggests that, at least in the adult population, social and emotional difficulties are widely distributed and are not confined to the more severe cases of learning disabilities. However, it should also be noted that overall the rates of reported problems are low and, at least in Bruck's study, most of the subjects were well-adjusted. More data are required to confirm the hypotheses that only a small proportion of these adults need clinical services and that fewer adjustment problems exist in the adult than in the child LD population.

Data presented here indicate that there is no association between asocial or deviant behavior and learning disabilities. These results are clearly inconsistent with other studies that are characterized by their retrospective and correlational nature (see Spreen, 1981, for a review). However, retrospective studies do not indicate whether LD subjects are more at risk for becoming delinquent than a nondisabled group; they merely show that delinquent or incarcerated samples include many subjects with poor learning skills or histories. In contrast, prospective studies such as Spreen's and Bruck's demonstrate that some LD children who are followed into late adolescence and early adulthood do commit delinquent offenses, but these offenses are similar in both frequency and quality to those of non-LD subjects.

The finding that LD females were at risk for poor adjustment characterizes not only samples of LD adults but also samples of LD children (see Bruck

1985b, for a review). In the case of the Bruck study, sex differences were specific to social and emotional functioning only; LD females and males did not differ in severity of childhood learning disabilities, adult literacy skills, occupational or educational achievements. The poorer adjustments of female subjects may reflect society's differential reaction to failure in males and females; girls who fail may be more rejected by peers and less accepted by adults than boys who fail. It is possible that these interactions are the precursors of social and emotional problems in LD females.

## Conclusions

Several conclusions from these four studies may be important to consider in planning services for LD adults.

1. It is important to realize that research-based conclusions about the need for services will vary as a function of the characteristics of the samples studied. In comparing Spreen's study with those of Bruck's, Childs', and Rawson's, it seems that social, educational, and intellectual factors, in and of themselves, are significantly related to adult outcomes. LD children with early diagnoses, adequate treatment, normal IQ's, strong parental support and understanding of the condition, and socially advantaged backgrounds are less likely to require specialized community services in adulthood. They will lead independent productive lives. LD adults from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who received little or no special help in childhood will require more services, especially in the area of occupational and educational rehabilitation. These data highlight the importance of establishing comprehensive universal services for LD children and adolescents to reduce the need for compensatory adult supports.

2. These studies show clearly that high school graduation is a critical prerequisite for LD individuals' successful occupational achievements. Thus, a fundamentally important goal is to provide LD students with an adequate and stimulating educational program, so that they maintain the motivation and skills to persist in their education, at least through high school.

3. LD adults can increase their literacy skills beyond high school; however, this does not occur by normal maturational processes. If, as Bruck found, the daily activity of concentrated reading and writing is associated with increased literacy skills, it seems that intensive daily remedial programs would be beneficial. The content of such programs is somewhat less clear. It appears that LD adults do not have primary comprehension difficulties, but rather their reading difficulties reflect problems with skills at the word recognition level. An optimal mix might be an eclectic program that emphasizes basic spelling and pronunciation patterns along with speed and accuracy in reading and spelling, and which focuses at the same time on basic compensatory strategies, such as comprehension monitoring, use of dictionaries and word processing programs.

4. University level services must be established for LD students, the

major proportion of whom will enter a college stream. (It is predicted that with decreasing employment opportunities and the lowering of admission standards, this trend will increase in the next decade.) Need for such services was amply demonstrated in the Bruck study. Many first year LD college students mistakenly assumed that, because they had completed high school, their problems were overcome. Thus, they took heavy course loads attending minimally to course content or requirements; they were quickly overwhelmed, leaving school within the first 18 months. With greater awareness and understanding of their disabilities and of the demands of the educational system, many such failures could be averted.

College faculty, as well as the LD students themselves, need to become more aware of and sensitive to the nature of learning disabilities. Faculty need encouragement to make special modifications for LD students (e.g., extending time limits on exams, giving oral exams, permitting oral or visual presentations rather than written term papers). Counsellors are pivotal in helping LD college students plan their programs. If an extra year or semester is required, the university should offer an equitable financial arrangement. Finally, colleges need specialists to provide remedial tutorial programs for LD students. It is encouraging that several Canadian and American universities (e.g., University of Toronto, York University, Brown University) are beginning to provide an array of services for LD students. Such programs are expected to directly affect the drop-out rates and educational achievements of these exceptional students.

5. Although the data clearly show that childhood learning disabilities are not precursors of adult psychopathology, it seems that some LD adults, especially female, experience more than usual social and emotional problems. In my own experience, I have found that many of these LD adults have poor understanding of the nature of their problems, avoid situations that remind them of their painful school experiences, and are often embarrassed by their poor skills. If they could explore the ways their problems are not unique, perhaps through self-awareness groups and discussions with other LD adults, many of those adjustment problems directly associated with learning disabilities might be lessened.

A final point in reply to an anticipated criticism of this paper—it may be argued that estimates of the number of unsuccessful LD adults are unrealistically low, since most of the data presented here derive from samples of children who were privileged in an economic, intellectual, and educational sense. Perhaps, but it seems equally likely that many learning disabled individuals need not evidence a lifelong *handicapping* condition, if their needs are fully attended to throughout childhood. With increased awareness of this invisible handicap, as reflected in legislation for appropriate childhood services, it is hoped that the inherent ability in LD children will be maximized and fewer of them will need specialized adult services.

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# LEARNING DISABLED ADULTS IN THE NETHERLANDS; A PROBLEM FOR THE FUTURE?

by Dr. A. J. Wilmink and Dr. R. de Groot

## Introduction

In the Netherlands, the term "learning disabled" is used to denote a category of people who are impeded in their learning process at school, because they do not have certain "integraties for learning" (Johnson & Myklebust, 1967).* The group is far from homogeneous, both as regards etiology and as regards remediation. Their problems greatly influence day-to-day functioning, particularly affecting information processing in reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic and the "organization" of support processes related to these activities.

This article explains what measures have been taken in the Netherlands for the care of learning disabled people, highlighting the extent to which these measures help reduce problems in learning disabled adults.

## Structural Provisions for Special Education in the Netherlands

Many special provisions exist in the Netherlands for learning disabled children and adolescents between the ages of 4 and 16 years of age. One of the objectives of the provisions is the realization of a preventive effect by the time these children reach adulthood.

A system of categorical facilities for the handicapped was initiated in the Netherlands as early as 1798. After World War II, this system expanded into a differentiated system of special education. At present, 16 categories of special education are recognized, including the one comprising schools for learning disabled students. These schools, as the following table shows, form the most rapidly growing category.

*Table 1.*

| | 1972/73 | 1981/82 | Difference | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Mentally handicapped* | 42,250 | 41,432 | −818 | −1.9 |
| handicap slight | 33,596 | 33,085 | −511 | −1.5 |
| handicap serious | 8,654 | 8,347 | −307 | −3.5 |
| *Learning disabled* | 19,964 | 33,445 | +13,481 | +67.5 |
| *Other categories* | 15,918 | 18,376 | + 2,458 | +15.4 |
| totals | 78,132 | 93,253 | +15,121 | +19.4 |

The growth of the learning disabled category is partly explained by the establishment within special schools of programs for very young children (4 to 7) and of programs at the secondary level (12 to 20 years of age).

The primary objective of the schools for the LD students is to provide appropriate remediation. A further objective is to promote the integration of the clients into the regular educational system. Until now, such integration has

*The Dutch refer to this group as leer-en opvoedingsmoeilijkheden (LOM)

been achieved only to a very small degree. Through specific measures affecting the organization of regular education, the Dutch government is trying to promote better integration in the future. Particularly in programs and schools for secondary special education facilitate the transition of the pupils to regular secondary education, and the situation seems to be improving.

In general, early remedial help for the learning disabled tends to result in "rehabilitation" in later life. A follow-up study by Van Goor-Lambo (1975), involving a group of former pupils of a school for very severely learning disabled students yielded the following data: 76.4% of the test-group of 220 former pupils were able to live independently in society, with sufficient social satisfaction; 10.5% managed to do so only with assistance and continued difficulties; and 13.1% were unable to lead an independent and self-supporting life.

In terms of employment, the general impression, one shared by officials of the Government Mediatory Service for Special Employment, is that as a category, learning disabled adults do not stand out as a particularly disadvantaged group. It must be noted, however, that this matter has not been investigated properly in the Netherlands. Moreover, this category is also affected by the general shortage of employment.

**Critical Comments**

Towards the end of the sixties and during the seventies, the 16 special education categories were much criticized, particularly in sociological and educational circles. It was argued that the classifications were too much a reflection of a medical orientation. On the whole, this criticism is not justified. Apart from medical criteria, there are also social, psychological and educational criteria governing admission to special schools and adherence to these criteria is strongly supported in the educational legislation.

It has appeared, however, that the dividing lines between the different forms of special education are not always clear. Additionally, differences in remediation between the 16 categories did not justify the existence of so many different types of special education; there was too much overlap between certain categories. Also, social criticism during the last few decades has become increasingly concerned that *special* education is becoming isolated from *regular* education, thus leading to discrimination. Such a closed system of special education, it is argued, is bound to promote self-fulfilling prophecies and offers the dangerous temptation for regular schools to indiscriminately relegate problem-pupils to special education.

This criticism has been partly instrumental in compelling the Dutch government, and particularly the Ministry of Education, to devise a completely new system of "basic" education (an integrated form of infant and elementary education). The new Basic Education Act went into effect on August 1, 1985, together with an interim-act governing basic special education and secondary special education. The main aspects of this new development are discussed in the following section.

While a system of special education may have the disadvantages just cited, it also has advantages. For one thing, the special education schools have at their disposal considerable "know-how" in the field of special facilities directed at diagnosis and remediation; for another, preventive measures can be taken at the appropriate stage, so that later in life better integration into both school and society can be achieved.

**Structural Provisions In the Regular Education System**

With the introduction of the new basic education acts on August 1, 1985, infant and elementary schools have been combined to form one basic school for children between 4 and 12 years of age. This arrangement also applies to special education, in which 4 to 12-year-olds are given remedial help in the so-called key-departments.

The new legislation governing regular education provides better opportunities for children with problems, including the learning disabled. The laws promote greater cooperation between regular and special education and provisions have been made for state-financed experimental projects. Children from special education schools who have transferred back to regular schools continue to receive help through itinerant special teachers. For this purpose, too, stipulations for this have also been incorporated into the new special education act. What is important is that for the time being the Netherlands is following a two-track policy: maintaining the special education system and at the same time providing better care within the regular education system. We consider this a sound policy, since it allows an optimal development and passing down of specific methods of remediation. Moreover, it is wise to let the point of emphasis in special care lie between the age-limits of 4 and 12 years, preventing problems which may become untreatable later.

Linked up with this system of differentiated basic education, there needs to be a system of differentiated secondary education. Within the secondary education system, vocational training courses in particular have attained a high degree of differentiation. Both boys and girls can now follow vocational training courses at all levels and adapted to their needs. This training prepares pupils for the technical and agricultural work, as well as for social work, nursing and the commercial world. This is particularly important for the learning disabled, who, whether they have had regular education or special education, can continue their schooling at regular schools for secondary education.

In the Netherlands emphasis is therefore placed on integration at the secondary school level. Thus, although it is possible for the learning disabled to pursue their schooling within the secondary special education system, we do not want to encourage large-scale use of this facility. In the vocational training courses, children with problems, including those with learning disabilities are cared for by means of differentiation. An example of a type of school which meets a widespread need at the level of secondary vocational

education is the so-called "Short Secondary Vocational Education." The distinguishing mark of this school is that the training leads directly to a particular vocation and the theoretical education is linked-up with an apprenticeship training. The learning disabled can also attend this type of school after they have had vocational or general secondary education at a lower level. Unfortunately, this possibility does not yet apply to other, more *generally* oriented branches of secondary education such as junior and senior general secondary education, and pre-university education. In these branches, there is no arrangement for the care of problem-pupils and also no "know-how" for special remediation.

In some places, evening classes are held where former pupils of special education schools, who do enter these more generally oriented schools, can obtain guidance from their former special education teachers. This kind of tutorial help needs to be increased and it should certainly be attached to schools for secondary special education.

The lack of such specific facilities in general secondary education is partly responsible for a phenomenon which is most disturbing: the problem of "drop-outs." An investigation by Mooy (1979) shows that 30% of the total secondary school population drops out prematurely. Of course, this percentage does not consist solely of learning disabled students; also included are a large number of pupils who lose the motivation for secondary schooling due to social and psychological circumstances. Rutter's (1979) London-based investigation shows that the "drop-out" phenomenon is closely connected with school factors and, in the Netherlands, Van der Wolf's (1984) smaller scale investigation shows the same trends.

Of concern is that although junior secondary vocational schools provide the most highly differentiated type of education, the largest percentage of students drop-out from this branch of secondary education. Therefore, differentiation alone does not seem to be an adequate measure against this phenomenon. A more pedagogically defined structure of appropriate measures seems necessary, together with a greater awareness of social developments on the part of secondary schools. This is clearly a dilemma of considerable scope.

### Learning Disabled Adults

Problems faced by learning disabled adults need to be investigated within a separate research framework. In the Netherlands this research framework is still in a very primitive stage of development. Follow-up studies are scarce and it is not yet clear how high the unemployment rate is among the learning disabled. We believe that those learning disabled who have had special education and are eager to be rehabilitated are later able to function quite well in their working life. Our conclusion is based on information obtained from officials in the Social Services who arrange for the employment of the learning disabled and also for former pupils and students. No reliable data on this are available except for those yielded by the one

follow-up study by Van Goor-Lambo (1975). We do not believe that learning disabled people form part of the hard core of 400,000 unemployed for whom finding employment will remain difficult, even in the future. The total number of unemployed people in the Netherlands is approximately 800,000, which is about 10% of the working population. At the same time, of course, a greater percentage of learning disabled adults is unemployed now compared to 20 or 30 years ago, but this is due to the general economic recession.

The fact that from the social point of view learning disabled adults have until now not stood out as a separate problem-category, can in our opinion, be explained by the Dutch school-system's proper preventive measures early on and better opportunities for integration at a more advanced age. Our social legislation bestows great care on the initiation of all young people into society. Fighting youth unemployment is one of the priorities of the Dutch socio-economic policy. Much attention is being given to vocational secondary schooling of the youth and to require continuation of secondary schooling in order to qualify within the social benefit system. This linking up of social benefit with schooling, proposed in a recent governmental bill, still needs to be adopted by parliament. Interestingly, such a regulation already exists in Sweden.

The Netherlands also has the Social Employment Act providing for the employment and rehabilitation of handicapped people in general, under which learning disabled adults, too, can make use of facilities. At present, there are 300 social employment/rehabilitation centers where handicapped people are given work opportunities. Some individuals proceed on to the regular industrial sector after a period of habituation and rehabilitation. Of these remaining, some are given permanent commercial jobs of full value within the social employment centers, while others perform simple, less exacting tasks.

In the last few years there has been an enormous increase in the number of people resorting to these employment/rehabilitation facilities. In 1970, employees numbered 43,723, while by 1983 this figure had risen to 79,917 (Central Bureau for Statistics, May 1982 and 1984). Through amendments in the social legislation, an attempt is being made to prevent a further growth. During the period 1966-1982, the category of persons for whom no diagnosis had been established and who could not be classified increased from 6.8% to 13.1%. This "remainder category" has proved to be the most rapidly growing and increasingly has included people with learning disabilities as well as some victims of the economic recession who make illegitimate use of the benefits (Data derived from a publication of the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau, 1985; see also Terpstra, 1985). Social legislation also includes a provision that 2% of the employees of every governmental service or private company consist of employable handicapped persons. Due to the rising unemployment, however, employers increasingly ignore this stipulation.

Another phenomenon that is becoming more apparent in the Nether-

lands is the growing need for adult basic education. On the one hand this need is due to increases in the numbers of foreigners seeking employment here: on the other hand it is a consequence of the greater societal emphasis on education in general. Elementary education for adults is provided by day and evening schools which are increasingly requesting special help for those of their students who are learning disabled. There is clearly room for specific investigation into the nature and the number of the learning disabled in these adult programs. Unfortunately, these schools do not yet have sufficient remedial programs; those people concerned with so-called "second opportunity" education do not yet understand the nature and magnitude of the problems or the sort of remedial help their learning disabled students need.

**Follow-up Care for the Learning Disabled Persons**

Learning disabled adults who received early and consistent education find themselves in a relatively favorable position compared with those whose disability was recognized late or not at all. Moreover, these former students of special education schools can avail themselves of follow-up municipal services in the larger cities and regional social/educational services elsewhere. Specialists offer weekly consulting hours and facilitate in matters of secondary education and to find suitable employment. They also refer clients to appropriate services in the case of emotional problems. Particularly in the bigger cities, former pupils of special education schools can attend evening classes at an LD school if they need help in their studies. The Mediatory Service for Special Employment, which works in cooperation with the Social Services, tries to find suitable employment for former special education students; the guiding principle is that the individual needs to take the initiative in applying for a suitable job. Matters are much more difficult in the case of those learning disabled young people who are identified too late or not at all; whether or not they receive help is mostly a matter of chance.

**Summary and Conclusions**

From a vocational point of view, learning disabled adults in the Netherlands have so far not *seemed* to have encountered unusual difficulty in finding suitable employment. It is expected, however, that employment problems will become more evident in the future. These authors deeply believe that the provisions made for elementary special education in the Netherlands lead to valuable prevention of problems and to learning disabled young people becoming socially and vocationally self-reliant. The case is quite different within general secondary education and pre-university education, where the guidance and special help for the *belatedly identified* learning disabled students are largely failing. In regard to general secondary education, there is no appropriate legislation forthcoming to provide solutions; facilities for supervision and remediation are almost non-existent throughout secondary and pre-university education.

Although a high degree of differentiation has been achieved in junior

secondary vocational education, the percentage of drop-outs is high. While the drop-out phenomenon is not limited to the learning disabled students, at least a part of the problem is disability-related. So far, few studies have been conducted in the Netherlands investigating the nature, number of needs of these learning disabled secondary students. Educational measures alone seem insufficient for solving the drop-out problem. Both school factors and social causes need to be dealt with at least to some extent by reaching beyond the school context. Politically, in the struggle against unemployment in the Netherlands, attention has been focused on the youth who are offered many opportunities for schooling and general education without financial burden. A bill proposing the linking of schooling and the right to social benefits has been submitted to parliament for adoption.

Through the provisions made under the Social Employment Act, the most severely learning disabled adults are given the opportunity for suitable work within the social employment/rehabilitation centers. Current policy, however, is to keep this category as small as possible and to provide opportunities for rehabilitation into a normal working life.

Our conclusion is that for favorable future developments, an educational policy is required that provides for better care for all problem students, including learning disabled students, in general secondary education schools. To begin with, a research policy will have to be adopted with the aim of achieving complete integration at the secondary level. Whether learning disabled adults in the Netherlands will have to face a disproportionate employment problem in the future, will, to some extent, depend on the policy for the secondary school level. Finally, attention needs to be paid to providing for learning disabled students within the adult education system.

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***The following excerpts are from a WRF-IEEIR fellowship report:* A Study of the School to Work Transition for Learning Disabled Students and the Learning Disabled Adult in Society in the Netherlands and Denmark, *prepared in 1984 by Paul Jay Gerber.***

While investigating the state-of-the-art of the LD adult in the Netherlands, the writer uncovered a point in philosophy that may have much to do with the apparent reticence of the Dutch government to provide services for learning disabled persons beyond the traditional school years. The Ministry of Social Affairs is currently questioning the extent to which those in the fields of human services should and can intervene into the social ecologies of disabled persons (in a generic sense). A point of debate then is where intervention becomes counterproductive by setting up synthetic ecologies which are held together only by the laws, rules, and provisions made by large bureaucracies and implemented by professionals who cannot begin to match the personal concern, resources, and initiative of natural social ecologies.

To this point, the investigator interviewed learning disabled adults of various ages and found generally that they are glad not to be in any system which provides differential considerations (good or bad) because of their learning disabled label. They firmly believed that the label was more of a handicap than their disability and that once in society they have faired well in social, vocational, and in most cases educational environments. Their beliefs may be borne out, at least in part, by follow-up research of LOM graduates and their current standing in Dutch society. In a study done by the Gemeentelijk Pedotherapeutisch Institute in Amsterdam, 224 former LOM students were investigated for social and vocational adjustment in adult life. It was found that 75 per cent had satisfactory adjustment in both criteria for success; the remaining 25 per cent need to be studied further. The Dutch ask a question similar to one asked by researchers in the United States about unsuccessful life adjustment: if this study were done with a representative sample of nonhandicapped Dutch adults would the result be much different than the LOM data? This is not to diminish the needs of the learning disabled individuals who evidenced unsuccessful adjustments, however. It simply puts the future challenge in perspective without decrying the efforts that are generally working well within the Dutch educational system.

**Author's Conclusions**

On the face of it, the Dutch system may appear to be less than progressive because of its current system of delivering services to LOM students in restrictive educational environments. Yet the very structure of the system allows for considerable flexibility for secondary school training. LOM students may select from several educational options which are well articulated and sequenced.

The majority of LOM students attend vocational programs starting at age

13 or 14. This allows for needed time to develop prevocational and vocational skills. Programming in special programs do not incorporate vocational training as an afterthought. Little is left to chance except job placement upon graduation.

If the Dutch underestimate the potential of LOM students there is still a concerted effort to maximize vocational training. Parents have been reported to be very happy with LOM programming on all levels, however. This positive attitude is fostered by the humanistic and personalized approach taken by Dutch educational personnel in making short and long term decisions about how to educate LOM students. Also to a significant degree, expectations of vocational preparation and adjustment are not colored by attitudes of job status.

With the onset of integration of handicapped and nonhandicapped students in education settings, LOM students will be able to access programs that have linkages to advanced levels of secondary education. A promising indication is the success of ITO-LOM students. Ongoing support for LOM students in secondary education will have a positive impact on the transition process.

The Dutch notion that LOM problems are only problems in school and not in society creates an interesting situation for LOM adults. Because of the "softness" of this disability, there are differential rights and privileges according to the degree of medical involvement in the condition in adulthood. At this time, however, it seems the Dutch are not able to extend added services because of budget problems and philosophical questions about meddling in social ecologies.

However, the system of block grant funding for education gives the opportunity for LOM adults and possibly the parents of LOM adults to participate in the political process of formulating educational priorities in local educational programming. There is much potential for citizen lobbying under this form of funding (especially with the sectarian and non-sectarian jurisdiction of education).

## Editorial Commentary: Views of US Needs

The advent of transitional programming in the field of learning disabilities demands a new era of response and services. The focus on transition means that professionals, parents, and learning disabled persons themselves are looking beyond the traditional years of schooling and the conventiional services in the field of learning disabilities. The field of learning disabilities has moved from an emphasis on elementary school programming and basic skills, to secondary school preparation and now to transitional planning. Soon the expansion of adult services will have to be considered. In essence, the field has come to fully address education, habilitation, and training throughout the life cycle. The efforts to cultivate an infrastructure of quality services in all facets of programming, particularly in transition from school to work and adult programming no doubt will extend to the end of this century and beyond.

The needs of learning disabled persons must be projected and programmed on a lifetime basis. What has become evident from emerging clinical reports and research is that learning disabled individuals have problems which persist through all stages and phases of development. These problems have implications for educational as well as social, vocational and daily living skills. Moreover, the problems, outside of the academic domain, may in fact be the most significant considering the adult adjustment problems currently being reported on in the literature.

Lifelong needs of learning disabled persons and the concommitant required responses from professionals in the field have several dimensions. First, the field of learning disabilities until recently has given little attention to the concept of transition from school to work or from school to school to work. Historically, the severely handicapped population have had well articulated transition services in place. These services have addressed and incorporated the broad issues of community adjustment and work adjustment into their service delivery models. Second, new conceptualizations of service delivery systems have focused on normalization, least restrictive environments, and community-based services which integrate learning disabled persons with non-handicapped individuals. Attitudes and acceptance behavior of society in general will be challenged when learning disabled individuals leave school programs and enter into communities and competitive work environments.

The need for effective transitional planning and programming is immediate. With an effective transition process there is a systematic entry into competitive employment, access to post-secondary education and training and a greater likelihood of independent living and community adjustment. Where transitional planning and programming is absent there is a haphazard, fragmented process, a patchwork of services that may be used despite

their counterpurposes, and frustration within the family who knows that the financial and psychological costs ultimately could be very high. The Danish model of transition is one exemplar. Because of their transitional programming the unemployment rate for learning disabled persons in Denmark is lower than that of the general population. This is an example of what is possible in an efficient, responsive system. The fact that successful programs exist extends hope and optimism for all those who depend on quality transitional programming.

It has been one generation of school-age students since the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act in the United States. In effect these students have come of age and now require a different professional commitment and a revamped conceptualization of services. Generally, learning disabled individuals in the United States are entitled to special education services until age 21. The trend of service delivery now shows greater commitment into young adulthood. For example, agencies like the Rehabilitation Services Administration has extended their eligibility criteria so that learning disabled persons can access vocational rehabilitation services. The question that emerges is: will there be a continued development of alternatives and options that will benefit learning disabled persons? Surely, without the aid of special services the transitional process is doomed. The larger question, however, extends beyond transition. Learning disabled persons must be helped to move into adult programs and services that will aid them in their life adjustment needs.

Without question transitional programming for learning disabled persons takes on different forms according to the country being studied. In some countries learning disabilities (or its equivalent) is education-specific and there are no services beyond the school-age years. In other countries learning disabilities is a problem that is addressed throughout the developmental continuum. In all cases there is increased emphasis on the period of transition either implicitly or explicitly designed in their service delivery systems.

This monograph is a valuable contribution to the literature of the transition of learning disabled persons from school to community adjustment. The contributors represent nations which have had a strong commitment to learning disabled persons for many years. Moreover, there is much to be learned about the transitional process by looking at the experiences of other countries. Some countries have been addressing transition for two generations of school-age children; others are just beginning. More important, however, there are conceptualizations, practices, and programs written about in this monograph which may have great utility for the learning disabilities field in the U.S. now.

Paul Gerber, Ph.D.

## Appendix A

## Best Practices—Biggest Deficiency

Four authors have summarized for us "best practices" and "biggest deficiency," (or most troublesome areas) in the area of learning disabilities in their countries.

### FROM THE NETHERLANDS

**Best Practices**

- Former students of special LD schools may return for additional schooling, if they desire, to what is known as "evening school."
- A teaching system in a theoretical practical type of school (L.B.O. where people can be prepared in an *individualized* way with remediation to become a carpenter, auto mechanic or other kind of tradesperson.
- An educational set-up for youngsters between 16-19 which gives them extra years of schooling and/or therapy as well as a kind of on-the-job training/work therapy (KMBO).

**Some Deficiencies**

- Too little research going on to learn more about the lives of adults with LD
- Need to have more opportunities (and perhaps more prestige) for "hands-on" or doing and experiencing types of school learning activities.

### FROM THE U.K.

**Best Practices**

*The Overall Strategy* seems to be to continue to secure fuller implementation of the following recommendations of a National working party set up in 1969: at the request of the Department of Employment, by the British Council for Rehabilitation (now under the aegis of the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation from whom the 1974 report "People with Dyslexia" can be obtained)

- *Identification of Dyslexia.* To prevent or mitigate dyslexia in adults by pre-school developmental assessment and by continuing "screening" at school, with appropriate remediation.
  To identify adults by appropriate psycho-educational assessment.
- *Remedial provision.* Expansion of facilities and of teacher training is necessary as is research into the best teaching techniques and materials for Adult Dyslexics.
- *Examination Bodies* of all kinds should consider making concessions so as to lessen the disadvantages of the dyslexic.
- *In Further and Higher Education* provision should be made for special consideration of dyslexic applicants, and where necessary for a longer time to complete academic and technical courses of study.
- *Employment of People with Dyslexia.* All those concerned with Careers and Employment advice should be helped to a fuller understanding of dyslexia and its problems, so that people with dyslexia may be helped to

obtain and retain employment commensurate with their abilities and aptitudes. Employers should receive similar help and guidance.

- *The Person with Dyslexia and the Community.* To educate the Public about the problems which beset people with dyslexia, so that they may receive more understanding, tolerance, and positive help.

**The Biggest Deficiency**

The biggest deficiency is in the lack of adequate provision by Statutory Authorities for specialized remedial services for school leavers and adults with dyslexia.

**FROM DENMARK**

**Best Practices**

- *Free special education programs* are available upon request for all adults. The variety of such programs is great, so it should be possible for the learning disabled adult to find a program with fellow students and a teacher, at a time and place that meets his needs.
- *Recognition of dyslexia in secondary education* makes it possible in certain instances to waive standard criteria for passing exams and provide some practical help during the course work and the exams.
- *The curator system* secures a carefully planned transition program including several practical work experiences for special class students. The curator (occupational counselor) is responsible for helping the students and their parents select vocational areas appropriate for their potential, skills and interest.
- *The awareness of dyslexia in the general population* has improved through more openess and information about the condition and its influence on daily life, which should make it easier for the dyslexic adult to cope with his problems in daily life.

**Most troublesome areas**

- *Normalization* in the sense that all citizens should have the same rights to education, social services, etc. through the same laws—*places the initiative on the individual* to apply for the needed assistance.
- *The idea of "no-labeling"* characterizes the present strong attitude against labeling people with disabilities. As a result some young learning disabled adults may leave the public school system without knowledge or understanding of the nature of their learning problems. This does not help them to cope with their specific problems.
- *The term "learning disabilities" is not recognized* as an official diagnostic category. The ambiguity of the term and the "no-labeling" trend probably adds to the reluctance toward a professional recognition of the category. While a general awareness of dyslexia is found, other problems typically related to "learning disabilities" are still only seldomly recognized and dealt with as part of a syndrome.
- *The transition from school to society is still a weak link* in what should be

an overall rehabilitation program. An extension of the curator system to cover a 3 year period after a young learning disabled student leaves the public school system would strengthen this link considerably. During this period a large number of students change jobs or give up on their first choice of secondary education or vocational training, with frustration and underemployment often resulting.

## FROM CANADA

### Best Practices

In Canada there is a realization that the majority of people with learning disabilities are able to forge successful adult lives, and require no special services. For those who do need help in making the transition from school to work, there is a realization that the type and level of services required will vary with the number of deficit areas, and the severity of the learning disabilities.

The most significant thrust currently taking place is a program being undertaken by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission (C.E.I.C.). This federal ministry has Employment Centers across the country where people can go for assistance with job finding, and to connect with job skills training programs. C.E.I.C. is developing awareness training programs for its personnel, which *should* dramatically increase the ability of Employment Centre personnel to recognize and deal effectively with people with learning disabilities.

A second important thrust comes through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of "physical and mental disabilities." The Canadian Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities has asked for affirmation by the government that learning disabilities is specifically covered by this wording.

### Biggest Deficiency

The biggest deficiency affecting people with learning disabilities is the lack of access to diagnostic and rehabilitative services, be they academic, social or vocational in nature. In no part of this country are learning disabilities recognized as disabilities which should be covered by provincial health care plans. As any special services or accommodations presume a diagnosed disability, the lack of access to diagnostic services creates a serious barrier for those who are least able to pay for it—the unemployed.

The issue is made even more complex with the realization that there are probably not sufficient diagnosticians able to make a good assessment of learning disabilities even if funds became available. Diagnosis is of little use unless tied in to appropriate rehabilitative services. At the present time there is an extreme paucity of specific programs designed to assist those who need help; those who are unemployed; underemployed; or incarcerated.

Progress is being made. Much remains to be done.

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